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# Indian Womanhood Today

*By*

MARGARET E. COUSINS, B. Mus.

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No. 5

**K I T A B I S T A N**  
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## PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

It is a laudable ambition on the part of Kitabistan to provide the Indian reading public with a series of volumes relating to problems besetting the path of India's national progress as they have arisen in new complexity and proportions in the throes of the political, cultural and spiritual renaissance through which this ancient country has been passing since the beginning of the present century.

The promoters of the project did me the honour of requesting me to compile one of the series, to be named "The Women's Movement in India." At first I shrank from the task even though I much appreciated the compliment involved. But I had already published a somewhat similar book, "The Awakening of Asian Womanhood," which includes historically valuable chapters describing the Awakening of *Indian* women to self-consciousness as a single all-Indian sisterhood, united by common interests.

of patriotism, and common limitations preventing their possibilities of service of their beloved Motherland and the expression of their souls. I have long desired to bring this record, which was published early in 1923, up to date. Kitabistan was giving me the chance! But still I hesitated, for the very passage of time had brought my Indian sisters into publicity as their own historians, and I cannot hope to give a more comprehensive view of the Indian woman's movement to solve its problems than have the 30 women leaders all of Indian birth in Kitabistan's former informative publication "Our Cause," edited by Shyam Kumari Nehru. But when the old saying "Spectators see most of the game" kept popping into my mind I realised that the circumstances of the first half of my life might have their own value in giving weight to evidence of the unbelievably rapid emergence of India's women of all castes and communities into the positions of honour they now hold, albeit the masses are still in the darkness of illiteracy, child marriage, poverty, and political subjection to a foreign race and government. I know only too well the "vague and ignorant

thinking" which generally prevails in India and in other countries about the high character and inherent ability of the women of India as well as about their chains of out-of-date customs, and I saw that it was my duty as well as my privilege to add this service of "witness" to whatever else I may have been permitted to do in my identification of my life in India with that of my Indian sisters, who have given me such affection, and from whom I have learnt so much of the Values of the Eternal.

The circumstances of my birth in Western Ireland of Protestant Unionist parents, though I myself became convinced of the justice and necessity of Home Rule for Ireland even if it in effect transferred power to Roman Catholic hands; the first half of my life being spent in Ireland in the forefront of causes of Freedom and Culture—Music, Poetry, the Irish Literary Theatre, the Home Rule Movement, and, intensively in the last ten years there, the Woman Suffrage Movement, filling the early married life of Dr. Cousins and myself, all caused me to come to India twenty-five years ago peculiarly well equipped to attune myself with the conditions

of India, which I found to be a political and social parallel, but 300-fold magnified, to the Ireland of a hundred years ago.

Being Irish, in India neither as a Christian missionary, nor as a British Government servant, nor for any political propaganda, and having already studied and gained much from Indian philosophies—Vedic, Buddhist, and Islamic,—it was easy for me to evaluate strong and weak points in present-day contemporary Indian civilisation; and within my first year of landing on Indian soil I was dedicated to the service of India *via* service to that half of India—its womanhood—which seemed to me the most direct instrument for leverage of the whole people. If the problems of womanhood could be solved it would most fundamentally and successfully be done in accord with the millenia-old spiritual attitude of the Indian Race-soul towards Womanhood and all it implies, influences, and controls.

For 30 years it has been my happy and strenuous lot, my good karma, to mingle freely with Indian men and women, rich and poor, Hindu, Muslim, Parsee, Christian, to give and take freely what my husband or I have to exchange of

viewpoints, knowledge, service. Such a varied life has given us a wealth of friendship and experience as rarely falls to Westerners in this land; and in this book I shall strive to share my blessings with readers whose circumstances have not given them the first-hand material by which to clarify their thinking and evaluate the present condition of the Indian women's movement and its probable lines of future development.

M. E. C.



CHAPTER I  
THE BACKGROUND  
(1875-1912)

The Art of History relies on the same laws of representation as the laws of the Art of Painting. To display successfully the immediate or the near, there must be objects which create a sense of perspective; in other words, to paint a foreground, a background must also be shown in the picture.

Remarkable history has been made relating to Womanhood in India particularly in the last twenty-five years. I find that I cannot begin to draw the outline of to-day, much less fill in the details, without sketching in events and conditions which create a background and give perspective. Then only will the miracle of the swift emergence of India's womanhood from the darkness of last century to the high light for it of these present years be likely to prove itself credible. |

A philosophic bent of mind accords peculiarly with an emotional nature passionate for re-

forming, glaring evil and injustice. It is through this queer assortment of outlooks that I have had to handle life, and they remind me at the outset of this projected picture that "The Eternal Feminine" is true, clich as it is, and that womanhood in its essentials and everywhere is very much the same though its expressions and conditions may greatly vary. Otherwise the human race would now and then have perished. Hinduism looks on Woman as the Shakti of Shiva, the Power behind the Throne, the equal Half of that Half-Lord-Half-Lady which constitutes the One, "Ardhanareshwara." Islam equates woman with the Mystery of Being, and its purdah is a symbol of the desirability of protecting what is most precious. Catholic Christianity calls the Virgin Mary—representative of all womanhood—the Queen of Angels and men, the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of God, and in daily practice implores her mediation to save people from the consequences of their sins. Christianity, also, after the Council of Trent (900 A.D.), recognised that Woman had a soul and that this gave her equal rights to work out her own salvation, attain Heaven in her own right,

and gain equality with man.

That gives the furthest stretch of my perspective; but for practical purposes, while acknowledging the brilliant women poets, philosophers, heroines, sages, of the Vedic and Mahabharata times, the famous propagandists, educationists, administrators of Buddhist times, the romantic women of statecraft and inspirers of great art and human love of the Moghul times, the devotees of the Prophet and the Koran, and women patriots within near historic times such as Padmini, the mother of Sivaji, Ahalyabai, Lakshmi of Jhansi; yet the condition of womanhood as a generality all over India is seen at the end of 1837 as at its lowest point of literacy, of individuality, of health, of social status, of freedom of movement or initiative, of economic status or powers. All this had come as the result of the military clashes in the country, of the misunderstandings of customs of different races and religions, of the common subjection of the men and women to foreign rulers, and the subservient inferiority complex that had been induced in them.

Let it be said at once that within this picture

there was a veiled strength and inherited wisdom and race-culture that ran in the blood of all the Indian people, inheritors as they were and are of the continuous history of 5,000 years now demonstrated by the excavations of Mohen-jodara and elsewhere. Pictures, sculptures, arts and crafts are sources of knowledge, philosophy, social living; are methods of civilisation as much as the vaunted way of reading and writing of the present world fashion for human development. Everywhere I have found throughout the people, men and women of all communities in India, nuances of cultural expression infinitely sensitive, full of reverence, redolent of the finest good taste, all based on an other-worldliness not met with in the West, a sense of Oneness of Being and Origin. India will never be the same as Europe or America. 1

But the tide of degeneracy faintly began to turn with, significantly enough, the Victorian era, when a woman began to hold sway over the destinies of Britain and its Colonies and India. It was in 1854 that a Government Despatch gave its blessing (and grants) to "Female Education" in India by encouraging girls to attend schools

which had been opened in villages for boys only. It was absurdly inadequate as a national policy of enlightenment, and still remains so, as is shown by the fact that only 7 per cent of the whole population of India has had sufficient facilities to become literate in the course of the last 100 years; and the literacy of India's womanhood is only between 2 and 3 per cent, and this in their own language, while knowledge of English by women is less than one per cent! This latter fact sheds a dark light on the absence of higher education amongst the masses of Indian women, as English has been the medium of instruction in Indian High Schools since Macaulay's time—about 1835.

While in the old days Indian boys and girls went to the same pial schools, schools in the system of education after the new English way were organised as for boys only, and only by the slowest degrees did any adequate number of schools for girls become established. For about forty years the facilities for education were decreasing under British rule. In 1854 the education authorities wakened up to this and allowed girls to attend boys' schools, but this

was only in the primary stages.

Only the Arya Samaj in North India, the Brahmo Samaj chiefly in Bengal, and the Christian Missionaries, came to the aid of Indian girls with women in all spheres of life between 1837 and 1886. These encouraged girls, over whom they had influence, to study and to qualify as teachers and nurses. It was through the initiative and self-sacrifice of the women of these communities that the general Indian public began to become accustomed to seeing women undertake paid public service. These were the people who laid the foundation of economic freedom for women in India in its modern form. Undoubtedly the religious and propagandist motive lay behind the desire to enlighten those women, and the strength of their religious faith gave those thus educated the courage to face outraged orthodox opinion and custom.

Individual women with overflowing love for their sisters devoted themselves to their uplift, women such as Pandita Ramabai of Poona, Mrs. Graham of Kalimpong, Rukhmabai who underwent the imprisonment which was inflicted on her because she would not conform with

the law of marital duty, so determined was she that she would study to become a Doctor and help women, which she eventually did. Amongst Hindu women the name and work of Ramabai Ranade stand very high for the institution she built up through devotion to the needs of her sisters of the poorer class in Poona city and district. She had no educational facilities, no special training and certificates such as are in these days considered essential; but she had vision of immediate practical ways of training women's hands and minds so that they could earn some money and increase their influence and interest in life and their powers of social service. The results have been astonishingly successful. New lives opened out for thousands of women who before then had had no expectation of anything but drab, penurious, cramped, miserable, parasitic existences. Lady J. C. Bose and her sister, Mrs. P. K. Gokhale, in Bengal; Miss Contractor, Miss Carpenter, in Bombay; Mrs. Parvati Chandrasekhara, in Mysore State, belong to the same order of our background of women liberators. Two great-hearted men stand out side by side with such women—Pandit Vidya-

sagar of Calcutta and Professor Karve of Poona. They opened the doors of freedom to widows by establishing Widows' Homes, which were indeed also pioneer efforts at Adult Education. In all Provinces of India one or two people devoted themselves to unostentatious institutions which became the nursery gardens from which seedlings of social service and brilliant scholarship and administrative capacity were transplanted and blossomed throughout India. The Parsi community as a whole and specially in Bombay were early in the field in organising technical, vocational and general educational facilities for their women.

In quite a different grade of society several outstanding women of Royal rank undoubtedly influenced national life by their ability for statesmanship. The late Maharani Regent of Mysore had her strong hand on the helm of state affairs during a long Regency, and wisely trained the character and guided the outlook of the late beloved Maharajah Krishna Wadiyar of Mysore, whose wisdom and goodness left Mysore the "model State" of India. Contemporay with her was the woman Ruler of Bhopal,

H. H. Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam Sahiba. Her mother and grandmother had also been the Rulers of that important Muhammadan State. She instituted all kinds of reforms, wrote books, established hospitals and schools, was Vice-Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University, was a great upholder of the vernaculars as the media of instruction and for general public usage at a time when the glamour of English and insistence on it was denationalising the country. It is related of her that on one of her many travels to Europe she bought 1,000 clocks in Switzerland which she donated to Bhopal State Public Offices and Government Schools so that there might be no excuse for unpunctuality. In Travancore State, in southernmost India, a woman Regent brought up the boy who later made history by opening the State Hindu Temples to the out-caste Harijans. Her first act on becoming Regent was to abolish all animal sacrifices in the State Temples. The high standard of Girls' Education in that progressive State is due to her influence during her Regency.

Nor can the influence of Her Highness the Maharani of Baroda be under-estimated. Her book

"The position of Women in Indian Life," published in 1911, is a classic on the Women's Movement and ideals of thirty years ago. All her life she has been a leader of women into new spheres of freedom, and it was entirely due to her initiative and courage that the All-India Women's Conference at its first session, which had been called to discuss Educational Reform, immediately started a social reform agitation for a law against child marriage.

It was in 1883 that the first Indian woman became a graduate of an Indian University, from Bethune College, Calcutta, the first Arts College for Women in India. Medicine claimed half of the 45 women who alone were students of Art Colleges five years later. Everyone of these women was a force whose potential will never be fully known. These pioneers had to bear then and for the next 20 years the burden of criticism from hardened custom and orthodoxy against girls receiving as much education as boys (in some cases against getting any education at all). Mrs. Rukminiamma of Mysore, Mrs. Sathianadhan of Madras, Miss Cornelia Sorabji of Bengal, Miss Bose, later of Lahore, Dr.

Muthulakshmi Reddi of Madras, Sister Subbalakshmi Ammal, M.A., the first Brahmin widow graduate—all these and the first hundred girl graduates proved their worth, upheld the dignity of scholarly womanhood, demonstrated their capacity for retaining the old ideals of the mother-woman with the extended powers of mothering ever-increasing numbers of students seeking education or the healing service, long before they had an idea that women would ever understand or take part in Politics or Law or respectable public entertaining or the Fine Arts. On the fineness of the example they held up, Indian public opinion swung round to a changed view of the desirability of giving women the same opportunities for education as boys and the same openings for public service as men in the national life. And beneath all this transition on its Hindu side was the belief in rebirth which held that the soul might in one life take a man's and in another a woman's body, a belief that prevents the single-sexed monopoly of opportunity inherent in the creeds that postulate only one life, and whose women have had to approach their problems from other points of view.

## CHAPTER II

# THE BEGINNINGS OF ALL-INDIA WOMANHOOD

(1912—1923).

. It is almost impossible for people who are nationals of small nations, such as the English, the Dutch, the Norwegians, the Spanish, the Japanese, to imagine, still less to realise, the vast extent, the immense population, the variety of ethnological types, the range of climatic conditions, the multitude of different languages, the contradictions of customs, included in the sub-continent known as India. What a problem is the attempt to create a United States of Europe ! Yet India is as large and as complex as Europe, excluding Russia !

It may have been that during the thousand years of Buddhism in India, unity came to a large area of this great land and its ancient religion-loving people, but we are without its complete history. We do know that the invasions from the

8th century onwards from Arabia, and those of the Persian-Moghuls from Iran and Iraq, broke up whatever unity may have held together the followers of the gentle Buddha. Certainly by 1500 A. D. there were as many separated and diverse nations in India as there are in Europe to-day. Five hundred years of Muslim rule gave Hindi-Hindustani as a language to three-quarters of the population of India, and with it an approach to a national unity and at least a dual national consciousness. It remained as one of the achievements of British rule in India that by its educational policy it made English the single medium of Higher Education for a unified British Government over the whole expanse of India, and sowed the seed of a single national consciousness which has in the last thirty years become so strong as to challenge the existing state of political affairs.

Until quite recently the women of England knew little or nothing of the women of Belgium, and the women of Finland little of the women of Spain. So also there was ignorance of one another between the women of the Punjab and the Malabar Coast, between the Bengalees and the women of Kashmir. The speed with which

India has become welded into a single national unit is one of the miracles of modern history. In the sphere of womanhood and its rapid evolution in the last 50 years, the emergence of a consciously fostered unity of Indian womanhood began from about 1914 when Dr. Annie Besant entered Indian politics and delivered a memorable series of public lectures in Madras City entitled "Wake up, India!" These resonated throughout India in a clarion call to the people to work out their own salvation by freeing their girls from illiteracy and child marriage, by freeing their outcastes (since re-named Harijans by Gandhiji) from all religious and social degradations, and by freeing the whole nation from foreign domination.

A wave of fresh enthusiasm then swept over the country for political freedom; and from the beginning it was linked with a realisation that it should be freedom for women as well as for men. There had been women members of the Indian National Congress from its inception; but from the time that Dr. Besant formed the Home Rule League, there was an accentuation of the political unity of India, and linked with

it the desire and the means for members of different geographical and linguistic areas to know one another personally, to merge in great groupings, focussed in single outstanding magnetic personalities, but each of such groups accepting as its definitive circle the word and the idea "All-Indian." There probably had existed right down the ages of Hindu India a unity of the Hindu people which realised itself and was self-conscious to a greater or lesser extent through the pilgrimages to the many holy shrines, to cover which necessitated visiting the four corners of this wide and varied sub-continent.

A student of history can see the same essentials of life and experience demonstrating themselves over and over again in slightly different guises. They are the changes of fashion in the expression of the mind of masses of people. For instance, I sometimes think that our present ideas that reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic, are the only bases of education, are only transient fashions of thought; that earlier civilisations had other methods (some by the ear alone, others by plastic symbols or pictures alone, or perhaps by even more occult systems), and that the literacy,

which is to us to-day so important may be superseded. Similarly the idea of nationalism, of unity on ethnological, geographical and linguistic bases may also prove to be only a passing fashion. We know as a fact of European history that it began with the times and influence of Joan of Arc and the rescue of France from the English. Five hundred years have now created nationalism as a well-established fashion of thought in Europe; but we find Premier C. Rajagopalachariar of Madras stating at a Memorial Meeting to Dr. A. Besant in October, 1940, that Dr. Besant "came from a distant country to instruct us in the love of our religion and in the love of our country. There was then no such thing as country." She came to India in 1893, and much had been accomplished by 1917. The rich seed of the idea of India as one united country had taken deep root. For 20 years there was only an extension of this thought; a growing devotion to it as an ideal. Within that time, actually in May 1917, the first *Women's Association* was founded whose aim was to be *All-Indian* in scope, to include as members all types of women who were resident in India

and to band them together for mutual service and the good of the country.

The Women's Indian Association placed religion, non-sectarian, as the base of its service. Mrs. Besant was its President, Mrs. Dorothy Jinarajadasa its Honorary Secretary for 8 years, an office later held in succession by Mrs. Margaret Cousins, Mrs. Malati Patwardhan, Mrs. Ammu Swaminadhan, Mrs. Dadhabhoy, Mrs. Ambujammal. Since Mrs. Besant's death Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi has been its President.

In the beginning of the awakening of women's responsibility for public service this organisation took a valuable historic part. Its afternoon classes were held in Branches as far apart as Srinagar, Madras, Calicut, Tanjore, Bezwada, Bombay, to take at random some of its 87 Branches in the years 1920-1930. It was meant in all its varied activities to serve *the country*, that country which a few years before had not existed in the heart as India the Motherland. There was also the Young Women's Christian Association spreading its Branches throughout India, and within the circumscribed area of one of the great religions creating a group

of women who distinctly thought in terms of United India, but also in the still wider circle of the world. The National Liberal Association included men and women, decidedly intelligentsia, and largely official. The Brahmo Samaj Women's Branch was acting more in Bengal than elsewhere. There were the Seva Sadans of Poona and Bombay, the Bharata Stri Mahamandal. In all of them there was a certain uniformity of search for a single formula of service. But more was needed.

Midway between 1910 and 1926 there came to India from London the Chief Secretary for India, the Honourable E. S. Montagu, to survey at first hand the justice of the Indian claim for Home Rule. I had been only a year in the country, but I had come East after one of the best possible apprenticeships to a cause struggling for freedom. I had been a lieutenant of Mrs. Pankhurst in the Votes for Women's cause in England and Ireland. I knew the ins and outs of approaching responsible Ministers of State. When week after week my husband and I read in daily papers of a never-ending stream of men going in deputation to the Viceroy and the Right Honourable E. S. Montagu, and never

mention of the voice of an Indian woman, all my training in organising, in taking hold of psychological moments, could not be curbed, and I approached about 20 of India's best known women in public life, most of whom I had met through the Senate Meetings of Professor Karve's Indian Women's University. Eventually it became my privilege to organise and carry through the one and only women's Deputation calling for Indian Reforms. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu was the spokeswoman of the 14 women who waited on the Viceroy and Mr. Montagu in Madras City, 18th December, 1917. These women came from different parts of India, and their Memorandum stating the requests of the women of India for better and increased facilities for education, improved health and maternity services, and the same franchise rights as would be extended to their brothers in the coming Reforms, marks a distinct milestone in the history of emergent womanhood in India. It was the first demand for votes for Indian women, and was based on the desire for service of their country and claimed on the same terms as might be granted to men. It requested that the disqualification of sex should

not be introduced in either Local Government or Legislative Franchise Rules. The success of this meek and thin voice of a handful of women in a loud chorus of assertive men was beyond all expectations.

This has always been referred to since as the "Votes for Women's Deputation." As the organiser of the Deputation, I happen to know that woman suffrage was not mooted when I first applied for permission to wait on the great men. The draft spoke only of education and social reforms, but the Secretary wrote that Deputations would be received only on political subjects. I then circulated a couple of extra sentences about political rights or rather "opportunities for political service" in the draft of the Memorandum. I knew the women interested in the Deputation believed in women being equal citizens of their country, and they wrote agreeing to the additions; so the vote was claimed. But in my own heart I thought it would be a century before Indian women would understand, or be interested in political matters. I entirely under-rated Indian mentality in that second year of my residence in India. I have

since learnt to judge nothing in this ancient and wise country by a standard of ordinary Western values of vaunted literacy. Indian womanhood is amongst the most intelligent in the world, apart altogether from standards of schooling.

This movement for political citizenship for women even so early as 1917 was an evidence of the existence of the consciousness in women as well as men of "India a Nation," a beloved Mother of whom all women were daughters.

The work of this Deputation was followed up by public meetings in support of Woman Suffrage held mainly by Branches of the Women's Indian Association in favour of the women's claim; by local area Political Conferences; by the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress; by a Women's Deputation to the Southborough Commission on Franchise Reform (which gave the first rebuff to the cause in 1918), and finally by a Deputation of women to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Government of India Bill in 1919. Mrs. Besant, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Mrs. Herabai Tata and Miss Mithan Tata, Bar-at-Law, were so convincing in their arguments that the British Parliament decided

to consider votes for Indian Women a "domestic subject" which Indian Provincial Legislatures might settle for themselves, the Official Government Members being left free to vote as they liked. This course of action proved the "Open Sesame" of citizenship to Indian womanhood. Britishers were just ignorant about the high regard in which Indian manhood holds Indian womanhood. The Legislatures one after another enfranchised the women of their Provinces on the same terms as men. And so between the Madras Legislative Council in 1921 and Behar Council in 1929 all the legislative areas of India had conferred the symbol and instrument of equal citizenship with men on women who possessed equal qualifications—a certain amount of literacy, property, age, payment of taxes, length of residence.

In granting woman suffrage Indian men showed great statesmanship, understanding of democratic values, sympathetic vision of the aspirations of the woman half of humanity, and courage to take a great progressive step unknown to their previous political history. Perhaps only women like myself who had suffered from the cruelties,



the injustices of the men politicians, the man-controlled Press, the man in the street, in England and Ireland while we waged our militant campaign for eight years there after all peaceful and constitutional means had been tried for fifty previous years, could fully appreciate the wisdom, nobility and the passing of fundamental tests in Self-Government of these Indian legislators.

By 1929 the Vote was one of the links making Indian womanhood a vital unit in the life of the single Nation—India. Some chapters in my book “The Awakening of Asian Womanhood” (Ganesh and Co., Madras) describe these historic debates; but only I can tell what led up to the vote on Woman’s suffrage in the Provincial Legislative Council of the United Provinces in 1923. As the Secretary of the Women’s Indian Association I was directly working for the spread of votes for women. One morning Pandit Gurtu wired me to come immediately to Lucknow to attend the Women’s Suffrage debate there five days later. I started the long tiring journey to an unknown town, had hard trials en route and on immediate arrival, but eventually found my host. Next day I found Mrs. Chak,

the one woman in the city who was then sufficiently interested in the subject to try and get women to come to the debate. All the time between then and the opening of the debate she and I got up and down the tonga calling on woman after woman to invite them to the Council Chamber. We worked against time and heat for members. When the debate opened there were women sitting all round the gallery—about forty. Over twenty Members of the Council spoke. Not a note of opposition was heard. The speeches were an accumulation of appreciation of woman past, present, future. What an experience it was for me who ten years before had to undergo imprisonment because of the protest four of us Irish women then made in Dublin against the omission of Votes for Women from the Home Rule Bill introduced in 1913, to sit there and hear those Indian politicians, and to watch the record being made of a unanimous vote being given in favour of granting women the franchise—and that in a Province as large as Great Britain ! How happy I was amongst my honoured Indian sisters; how glad we had gathered them there ! And it is in the United Pro-

vinces that the greatest number of women were ten years later elected Members of Council, and that the first Woman Minister of India was appointed, Mrs. V. L. Pandit.

From around the date of the 1917 Deputation another subject was creating an all-Indian unity amongst women, namely, the Health Service of All-India. A single organisation throughout India linked lovers of children together. The Red Cross organised the "All-India Maternity and Child Welfare Association," and through its instrumentality organised Health Weeks annually which have successfully speeded up alert interest in Hygienic Education, created local Child Welfare Centres, pre-natal clinics, the Lady Reading Health Centre in Delhi; and an All-India Central Conference, Delhi, in Feb., 1927, for men and women which was another landmark in the advancement of the interests and needs of women and little children..

The Girl Guide movement created an all-India unity and strength amongst little girls of Blue Bird age, girls of Girl Guide years, and leaders for these—the fine bands of Rangers. These all built up a desire and organisation

for open-air life and detailed usefulness and general knowledge through Badge Tests which made parents loosen their bonds of conservatism, has given young people greater freedom of movement and more civic and First Aid usefulness than before, and instilled a discipline which is linked to nationalism and internationalism.

In different Provinces women banded themselves for social service, education, economic and religious purposes—The Bombay National Council of Women, The Seva Sadan of Poona and Bombay, The Saroj Nalini Dutt Mahila Samitis, the Bharata Stri Mahamandilum of Bengal, the Arya Samaj of the Panjab and United Provinces, the Mahila Seva Samaj of Mysore, the many Women's Clubs for recreation.

Then the converging process began which brought all these diffused energies to a point of focus. The All-India Women's Conference was called into existence in October, 1926, for this purpose, and its first Conferences of delegates from its Constituent Conferences took place in Poona, 5th to 8th January, 1927. It proved itself an event of major importance in the quickly rising speed of women's development. The fol-

lowing is the genesis of that Conference.—Again as in 1883, Bethune College, Calcutta, formed the platform for advance. At its Annual Prize-giving, the Bengal Inspector of Education threw out a challenge to women to tell the country what kind of education they wanted for girls, and not to be content with leaving the making of curricula in the hands of men. A couple of articles by Mrs. Huidekoper on this challenge were printed in "Stri Dharma," the monthly magazine of the Women's Indian Association. I was at that time Hon. Secretary of this Association, and these articles stimulated me to draft a scheme for holding a Women's Conference of an all-India scope and character on Educational Reform. Less than a year after Mr. Oaten's challenge a circular letter was sent in the name of the Women's Indian Association to Women's Societies of all kinds throughout India inviting their co-operation in the plan to hold a central All-India Women's Conference to be composed of delegates elected by Constituent Conferences. The latter were to be held in leading cities, and should be organised each for the express purpose by a Committee composed of a representative of

each available women's society in the area and other leading women of all communities and interests. The Conference was planned to take place within six months of this letter of invitation.

It was a courageous and ambitious scheme. Nothing like it had before been attempted. A sufficient number of places replied welcoming the scheme and promising to hold local Conferences. This ensured a minimum of fifty delegates attending an *All-India* gathering in Poona City at the end of 1926. I was requested to act as its Organising Secretary. I accepted the honour, though I realised the responsibility, the hard work, and the possibility of failure involved. Probably my readiness to face the last-mentioned was my best qualification for the office. Sri-mati Sarojini Naidu gave it her full support from the beginning, and persuaded Her Highness the Maharani Chimnabai Gaekwad of Baroda to preside at that first session.

The Conference has since held annual sessions, for each of which numbers of Constituent areas and local Sub-Constituency Conferences have acted as feeders from which the delegates for the All-India session are elected.

The Reports of those sequential sessions, are a history in themselves of the development of the women's movement in India. The Conference has been amazingly successful in creating a united sisterhood of Hindu, Muhammadan, Sikh, Indian Christian and Parsi women with a sprinkling of broad-visioned Western women. The first aim of these women was service of their daughters through the reform of education. It is worth while to quote the first two Resolutions of that first session, which still remain an unfulfilled ideal:

(1) "This Conference defines education as training which will enable the child or the individual to develop his or her latent capacities to their fullest extent for the service of humanity. It must, therefore, include elements for physical, mental, emotional, civic and spiritual development. The courses of study arranged for this purpose must be so flexible as to allow of adaptation to the conditions of the individual, the locality, and the community."

(2) "Moral training, based on spiritual ideals, should be made compulsory for all schools and colleges." Quickly came the expansion of the aims of the Conference—the need to include Social Re-

form, the abolition of Child Marriage, the reform of Laws about marriage, divorce, and inheritance. By then (1929) the political awakening of the masses was upon India in the non-violent Non-Co-operation movement. Arising out of it an agitation about the political status of Indian women in any proposed Reform Bill became the spearhead of an additional activity for the Conference. Its Deputation to the Viceroy procured the inclusion of women delegates to the Round Table Conferences. From 1931 to 1933 the Conference gave splendid leadership on the entire question of the views of women on franchise qualifications. All-India womanhood, through the Conference, opposed communal electorates, "reserved seats" for women, and "wifehood" qualification. It favoured literacy qualification, and all terms of equality with men voters, but considered adult suffrage the only satisfactory solution of all the suffrage problems. Indian women are still entirely dissatisfied with the present franchise conditions for women.

In other directions during these years the Conference fully discussed Birth Control and ranked itself in its favour when directed by Medi-

cal Clinics. It fostered all indigenous industries, Swadeshi and Khadi, and encouraged the revival of Indian culture by holding exhibitions of articles, pictures, folk dances, folk customs, belonging to India's age-old tradition and civilisation.

With the rapid rise of political consciousness, and the growth of awareness amongst the masses of the condition of subjection of India to a foreign Government, the large majority of delegates to the Annual Conference moved towards the realisation of the fundamental necessity there is for India to become a self-governing, independent nation. In order to express this political belief the Constitution had to be widened from its original policy—"The Conference shall not engage in any party politics, but shall unite on such points as affect women and children." It now embraces the full circle of the life of India as follows:

"The A. I. W. C. shall not belong to any political organisation nor take an active part in party politics, but shall be free to discuss and contribute to all questions and matters that affect the welfare of the people of India, with parti-

cular reference to women and children."

The distance travelled by women in developing their sense of a united nationality can be measured by the Resolution passed at the 15th session at Bangalore (1940):—

"This Conference views with the utmost distress the continuance of war in various parts of the world. It expresses its horror at the cruel suffering inflicted on innocent people, at the loss of human life, at the destruction of great centres of learning and priceless treasures of art, at the colossal waste of wealth, and above all at the hatred engendered in the hearts of men. It once more affirms its faith in non-violence as the best solution of the world's ills, and appeals to the Governments of all nations to put aside their weapons of destruction and seek peace in ways other than war. It appeals to the women of the world in particular to throw in the full weight of their moral force on the side of permanent world peace, which is impossible without a New Order based on social justice and equality of all nations. It, therefore, recognises that there can be no world peace till India and every subject nation attain their liberty, as the first and

logical step towards the attainment of the ideals for which Britain has declared she is at war.

This Conference cannot but deplore the sufferings of the peoples whose freedom has been taken from them, and reiterates that war can never solve any problem."

### CHAPTER III

## INDIAN WOMEN AND FREEDOM

I have lived in India for over 25 years. I have always loved the Indian people. I have had the great privilege of mixing very intimately with their home life. I have tried to find the best points in their habits and customs. I have had special opportunities of contacting the lives led by women in all but two of its Provinces. But, with all the good-will in the world, my daily growing experience of India brings with it a daily growing knowledge that, when compared with the freedom of thought, word, and action in which the women of other countries live, the women of India are far away from the freedom that they need.

This does not apply fully to the women of the lower castes, such as the peasant class or the coolie class; neither does it apply to the women of the West Coast nor to Bombay; but, with variations in degree, and with notable

exceptional groups and individuals, I am convinced of its general truth. The majority of those affected do not realise the limitations of their lives. They have seen nothing different; or where they see it in the case of Britishers, it is so far removed from anything practical for them at the moment that it is without appeal to them. Yet to the minds of those who desire to serve India, and who have seen what may be the fulness of women's lives in other civilisations both East and West—in Burma, Japan, America and Europe,—no movement connected with the freedom of India seems more fundamentally necessary than the Freedom for Women's movement. Not all the Governments in the world can give India true Swaraj if Indians themselves, men and women, do not remove the chains of out-of-date custom that hold the higher-class Indian women in impoverishment of body, mind and soul.

For Northern women and for all Muhammadan women the purdah or zenana system is the gaoler. For South Indian and non-purdah women it is the early-marriage system and its concomitant, the exaggeration of the idea of wifely obedience. Underlying all the limitations

imposed on women is an appalling lack of faith in the 'higher and purer nature of men and women. The men seem to think that the sight and companionship of women would tempt them beyond control, or each man thinks that while he would be all right, no other man could be trusted to speak to his women-folk, and especially not the men of his own station in life. The women are brought up to look on men (other than father, husband or brother) as their natural enemies. They also have lack of faith in their own sex. What a vicious circle! For the prevention of a few errant human beings all women are "cribbed, cabined, and confined," and a poisonous atmosphere permeates all Indian life. I believe that this mutual fear is a miasma, a carry-over from a time of conflict, and it is an unfounded slur on both sexes in the present day.

The zenana system prevents free and natural physical exercise such as walking; it promotes bad health and especially consumption through lack of fresh air and sunlight; it arrests the development of the body; it still more arrests the development of the mind. I might have thought

it was my own point of view that was at fault in so strongly condemning a foreign system, if it were not for the appeals that have been made to me personally by those who live in the zenanas. "We are in prison," said an intelligent group of ladies belonging to one family. And even as they spoke one of them slid back into an adjoining room because her brother-in-law had joined us and she must not be seen by him ! At the end of a purdah meeting that I held, a young Muhammadan woman came right up from the audience to where I had stood and clasping her hands together made a piteous appeal to us in Hindi to come to the help of the women behind the purdah. "You educate us till we are ten or twelve, and then we are pushed behind the curtains and no one cares any more about us, and we long for further knowledge but we are in chains." When I drove in the curtained and boxed-in purdah school conveyances, I felt for myself the sense of suffocation, the close air, the impoverishment of education, that came from the absence of stimulation induced by the sights and sounds of the life of common humanity in the streets. I also saw for

myself that even amongst the orthodox older ladies, who probably would proclaim their approval of the purdah, human nature and natural curiosity assert themselves, for they took every opportunity to peep through the slits and small mica openings in the coverings of our motor-car, and enjoyed every excuse for getting a drive or a change from their houses. I also came across a number of instances where ladies who kept strict purdah in their home towns had no hesitation in moving about freely and uncurtained in a town elsewhere.

As for disease, and especially consumption, it is rampant among the inmates of the zenanas. A doctor of a royal household himself told me of the case of the death of a junior princess which might have been prevented if only the doctors had been allowed to see her in time and diagnose from the eye. They had been permitted only to feel her pulse, her hand being thrust through a curtain. When she was at death's door they saw her face and recognised the true nature of her disease which they would have been able to cure had they known it earlier. She was one of the many victims of this unnatural system.

In the South, while there is more freedom of movement, women seem to have to ask "permission" before they make any new move. This is not the case with adult women in other countries. It is the natural result of the child-wife system. The husband feels himself as much father as husband to his little girl-wife, and it is hard for both of them to get out of the wrong relationship when she grows up. The wrong atmosphere it engenders about marriage was exemplified to me when, in reply to my enquiries about his newly-wed wife aged ten, a college student replied with pride, "I think she will be very obedient".

More and more the whole world is coming to realise the right and the necessity of the soul to freedom of opportunity for self-expression. Self-determination is a necessity for the individual man or woman as much as for the caste, class, or nation. The whole Time-Spirit is working towards the liberation of woman in every country, but along different lines according to the different civilisations. How can we help it in its work in India ?

There are seven million more men than

women in India, therefore it follows as a national service that every woman should marry, and it is the way to freedom for married women that we have to seek. It has been found along one road in places so far removed as Malabar and Burma. There it has come through economic freedom. Land and property lie in the hands of women entirely amongst the West Coast people, and money was made almost entirely by women in pre-war Burma; they were the shopkeepers of their nation. We may call that the power of the purse.

There are four great Liberators standing ready to aid women to freedom. They are Religion, Education, Patriotism and Love.

There is an atmosphere of freedom for women in all centres of pilgrimage and holiness. Benares City and the holy Ganges are graduating colleges in emancipation for the women of the purdah-keeping Provinces. What a breath of fresh air and fresh vitality comes to every woman who goes on a religious pilgrimage ! What equality and what absence of sex-consciousness there is for women as they bathe ceremonially in holy rivers North or South ! The freest woman in the world probably is the authentic

sannyasini. It is one of the astounding paradoxical surprises of paradoxical and self-contradictory India to see the most veiled and sheltered of purdah women on dry land suddenly appearing without any shyness or awkwardness in the Ganges or the Jumna side by side with men of all kinds. If only all life be looked on as a pilgrimage, if the home be regarded as a holy place, if only the spiritual attitude is taken of soul helping soul rather than of sex vehicles ready to prey on one another, then the burden of sex limitation will be lifted from the shoulders of fettered womanhood and suspicious manhood.

Education is a liberating influence of the greatest importance. A trained and well-furnished mind gives its owner self-confidence, discrimination, a proper comparative sense of values, and independence necessary as an accompaniment to greater freedom of action, responsibility and movement. Ignorance is weakness, knowledge is power. We have to pull up the percentage of literate women from the present shameful 3 per cent to 93. It is a task of supreme importance and of almost paralysing magnitude, but it has been done by other nations, and it

must be accomplished by the various Indian Provinces. In Kashmir the desire to help women along this path to freedom has sprung up so strongly that a band of volunteers has been formed of young men who have pledged themselves to teach the reading and writing of their vernacular to the women of their families. It was started in Srinagar, and in two months 450 Kashmiri primers were purchased. If this type of national service will only spread and fire the imagination and the zeal of those who have themselves had the privilege of education, a long step on the road to the freedom of womanhood and the freedom of India will have been taken. The present rate of growth of education amongst women is far too slow. The mother should be the guru of the child; instead, if we bring a notice of a meeting to a lady in her home, she has to call out for her little Ramaswami or her little Sushila, and the child reads out the notice; the child is now the guru of the mother—truly it is the Kali Yuga ! But when women are able to read for themselves scriptures, books of travel, biographies, novels and newspapers, what an expansion of consciousness there will

be ! How the mental horizon will widen, what freedom of thought will be stimulated that later will express itself in insistence on the necessary freedom of action for the manifestation of the growing soul !

Patriotism is playing an important part in emancipating Indian women. I remember how they were stirred to their depths by the internment of Mrs. Besant in 1916, and I walked with a large number of them in a public procession of men and women in honour of her release. Things have gone very swiftly for women as well as men since then, and even Muhammadan women, like the mother of the Ali brothers, the political leaders of 1917, have come out of the zenana as their sacrifice to their patriotism. Whether we approve of their political policy or not, it is a wonderful fact that women's ardent desire for the freedom of their country has given them such personal freedom that they are now welcomed into the open streets as volunteers, as pickets as politicians. "Causes save one," remarked a wise woman once. This is particularly true of women. Their line of least resistance is self-sacrifice. They do not naturally move towards

fighting for their own freedom, but through throwing themselves into a "cause", they achieve their own liberation. The "cause", however, must itself be related to the attainment of some aspect of progress or emancipation. The Indian national movement cannot progress without the aid of women; the liberation of women is being most fundamentally aided by their devotion to the national movement.

Finally—and primarily—there is the universal as well as personal unloosener of all bonds—Love. If only there were deep, true love existing between each married adult man and woman in India there would be no need for this chapter. "Perfect love casteth out fear." Where there is perfect love there is perfect faith and perfect equality. Suspicion, jealousy, domination, obedience, limitations, all disappear. Even the thought of freedom vanishes in the realisation of perfect partnership that is unity, not duality;

"Freedom that is fond of its own name  
Has not yet shed its chains, but perfect love  
Makes happy bonds that are but anchorage  
To the free soul."

## CHAPTER IV

### INDIAN WOMEN AND POLITICS

In A. D. 1900 the general condition of Indian womanhood may be said to have been at its lowest ebb. By A. D. 1940, the tide of social, educational and political honour for women had risen so high that India had eighty women Members in the Legislatures of its combined Provinces and States, and thus stood third amongst the nations of the world as regards the political influence and position secured by its women.

How had this leap from the depths to the heights been made in forty years? And in a country where change is proverbially slow?

Primarily it was because the movement for the progress and freedom of the women of India was one and the same movement as that for the progress and freedom of India itself. In that sense Indian men and women march together, and efforts to improve conditions of individuals,

communities, sexes or classes are related at every point with the most urgent need of any country in subjection, that of its achievement of political liberation.

The self-conscious movement for Indian political freedom began with the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. From the very first its membership was open to women on the same terms as to men. Year after year saw women attending its annual sessions. One Bengali woman member, Srimati Saraladevi Choudhrani of the Tagore family, made Congress history in the session held in Calcutta in 1904 when she trained a group to sing "Bande Mataram," a national song which immediately became as famous for its power to arouse patriotic emotions as "La Marsellaise" amongst the French people. I remember first meeting Srimati Saraladevi at the first Senate meeting of the Karve Women's University in Poona, and being impressed by her spiritual and patrician personality.

Perhaps in those early days women went to those Congress sessions more as the helpmates of their husbands, to see after their food and

creature comforts—so I have heard it said—than because of their own individual interest' in the debates. But the entry of Mrs. Annie Besant into Indian politics in 1914 galvanised new and increased national consciousness in both men and women. The internment of this woman leader for carrying on propaganda for Indian freedom in 1916 during the World War by the then Governor of Madras, Lord Pentland, roused patriotism in many a sensitive woman's heart, and they joined for the first time with men in public processions of protest against this action of Government and later showed their gratitude to Mrs. Besant in the great welcomes back from her internment that were given all over India to her after her release. At this time women were also joining the Indian Home Rule League.

Then came the memorable year 1917 when the members of the Indian National Congress unanimously elected a woman for the first time, and a British woman at that, Mrs. Annie Besant, as the President of their annual Congress held that year at Calcutta. For the year of her Presidentship she travelled up and down the vast sub-continent rousing patriotic self-conscious-

enthusiasm with which a grandson, accompanied by his mother, escorted his grandmother to the polling booth in one of the Madras City Wards, and the ovation the old lady got from the crowd when she dismounted from her rickshaw and entered the booth to record her vote for the first time, as one of the Indian women then made voters for the first time in Indian history.

No women had the right accorded to them to be members of the Legislatures until 1926, and even then it was by Government nomination that a few women were appointed, and first in Indian State Legislative Councils. Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddi was the first woman to sit in the Legislatures of the Indian Provinces, and she made a historical record by receiving a unanimous election, soon after taking her seat, to the high and difficult position of Deputy Speaker of the Madras Legislative Council. She acted in that capacity for nearly three years, when she resigned her nominated seat in protest against the Government's imprisonment of Mahatma Gandhi, and in so doing risked wrecking her political career. It was thus early demonstrated that women in the political field put principles

before political self-interest.

It was about this same time that women began in numbers to seek election also to Municipal Councils and gained great success in their efforts. An outstanding instance was when four women in Bombay City topped the polls of four important wards, one being Mrs. Sarojini Naidu who was also then invited to become the Mayor of Bombay but declined.

Srimati Kamaladevi had been the first woman to brave the risks of a contested election to a Legislative Council, when she stood as an Independent against a man Congress candidate in 1926 for the South Kerala Constituency, Madras Presidency. She was defeated by a majority of 600 out of a total 5,000 polled votes. Her opponent had been nursing the constituency for two years, while her campaign lasted only some months. In the last hectic days of the contest "Vote for the lady" was the popular slogan. Her band of volunteer workers, self-named "The Knights of the Blue Lotus", rise before my mind's eye as I write; and the way her husband gained votes for her in the villages by singing national songs to the audiences was unique! It was my

first experience of electioneering in India and remains a very flavorous memory of a historic step in women's march into politics.

This was the situation of affairs when in 1929 Mahatma Gandhi started his dramatic march to Dandi to make salt on the sea-coast in protest against the increase on the tax that had been imposed on salt by the Power of Certification of the Viceroy against the vote of all the Legislative and other representative bodies of the land. No women were included in the personnel of Gandhiji's chosen marchers. But Sarojini Devi Naidu joined them at their destination and was the first woman arrested in the great non-violent, non-resisting, non-co-operative movement that lasted from 1929 to 1932. That Salt Satyagraha movement had as deep a significance for India as had the throwing into Boston Bay of the over-taxed boxes of tea which began the American War of Independence.

During these years the response of Indian women to the call for patriotic self-sacrifice was magnificent. Over three thousand women served terms of severe imprisonment, suffered lathi charges, cruelty, loss of property, loss

of reputation. They willingly faced publicity and danger of the most trying kind in picketing drink shops and foreign cloth shops, in walking in public processions, in undergoing proceedings in law courts. They sacrificed all kinds of cherished and religious privileges of caste, ceremonial purity, and privacy, during the campaign and in prison. The cause of Swaraj swept all taboos and old customs before it. The revered leader, Gandhiji, was sufficient guarantee to the women of the righteousness of whatever new actions had to be taken.

In struggling for the Nation's freedom women achieved their own freedom to an extent hardly credible. In that great crusade women of all castes and communities, all degrees of poverty and wealth, shared the burdens, the pain, the sacrifices, the joys of an individual new freedom gained by acting in response to the need of the moment without reference to old precedents, customs, shibboleths of "proper" sex conduct, and sex separateness. Men and women acted as souls, not as sexes; soul-force was their weapon and safeguard. They learnt new respect for one another's all-round capacities and charac-

ters displayed in that new light of national service. Srimati Sarojini Naidu was the most outstanding woman of those years, and Srimati Kamaladevi was the leader of its youth, her beauty, eloquence, brains, audacity and charm making her particularly popular. Other prominent women leaders were Mrs. Rukmini Lakshmi pathi (Madras), Mrs. Hansa Mehta, (Bombay), Mrs. Kasturbai Gandhi (Sabarmati), Mrs. Zutshi (Lahore), Mrs. Captain (Bombay), Mrs. Nellie Sen Gupta (Calcutta), Satyavati Devi (Delhi), Miraben (Miss Slade, Ahmedabad), Mrs. Jaffar Ali (Lucknow), Durgabai (Andhra desa), Kuttimala Amma (Malabar). I knew a family group in which the grandmother was in prison at the same time as her three granddaughters in their teens. The girls had to serve a two years' sentence each but had the advantage of "B" Class, while the old lady had to endure "C" the lowest class, for one year. Women who had never been out of purdah faced the bare-facedness of walking unveiled in public processions and all that was afterwards involved in prison life; mothers who were already in the family-way braved the dangers of childbirth in prison

and thought it no indignity to the coming babe, but an honour; the Devadasi or dancing girl heard the call of Mahatmaji and left her vocation braving the treatment she might be given by her "respectable" fellow-prisoners; but I saw the most orthodox of Brahmin women mingling socially, even eating with her, while she wept as she was being released because her Satyagrahi sisters had treated her as a soul and an equal. A white-haired grandmother, a sturdy and literate peasant woman, and her middle-aged daughter, unexpectedly appeared amongst our political group in prison one day. Their story was that they used to hear their men-folk talk of the Swaraj movement and how Gandhiji was also in prison. They said to one another: "If he is in jail, then we must go there too." They waited till their men had gone to the fields next day, then went first to their nearest temple to worship God, walked seven miles to the nearest town and there picketed a foreign cloth shop till they were arrested. They were contented only when they were behind prison bars, so afraid had they been that some of their relatives would find some way of frustrating their passion for pat-

riotic self-sacrifice. Such was the spirit which flowed through the women like a flood. They turned the prison into a temple and the way thereto into a path of pilgrimage. While to each and everyone Mahatma Gandhi was the Saint, the Holy Man, the revered Leader under whose National Congress Flag no pollution or evil could come to them.

When the Round Table Conferences followed Civil Disobedience, the All-India Women's Conference agitated for some women to be sent to them. This was the most representative Association of women in India by that time (1933). It voiced women's demands that in the new reforms or the new Indian Constitution there should be no communal electorates, there should be only general electorates; there should be no reserved seats for women; there should be no nominated seats; that literacy should be a qualification for women voters; that mere wifehood of a man voter should not be a qualification for a woman voter. They also called for an increased percentage of voting power for women and the removal of sex disabilities for taking office. Theirs was a far-sighted

and selfless lead which would have saved the country from the deplorable communalism into which it afterwards drifted; but men failed to follow the vision of their womanhood, and even forced women to conform to the programme that they thought necessary for men.

The women who between 1917 and 1934 most directly brought about the present political status of women in India through their personal contacts with Members of the British Parliament were (chronologically) Mrs. Annie Besant, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Mrs. Herabai Tata, Miss Mithan Tata, Mrs. Subbaroyan, Begum Shah Nawaz, Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, and Begum Hamid Ali.

The India Bill of 1935 set the stage for the General Election which was decreed for 1936. After the dramatic, historic, and unprecedented Civil Disobedience campaign which had brought women through the prisons, the women of the masses were now enthusiastic in electioneering. It was evident that the women voters, now raised in number to about five million—the women in villages and towns, the women workers—were awake to their responsibilities and their

powers as enfranchised citizens, and they would cast their vote for Congress candidates as a direct means of securing self-government. Though disliking the reservation for women of a certain number of seats, and shrinking from a contest between women candidates only, they used their votes so that Congress women should be returned.

In the few areas where women got the opportunity to contest general seats with men, women were extraordinarily successful. The combination of Congress and gratitude to women for their sacrifices for patriotism put the women in such elections at the head of the polls. After the prisons, the polls; after the dolls, the parliaments. Over eighty women had by 1941 been elected legislators. That forms a chapter of history by itself.

## CHAPTER V

### A TYPICAL STORY OF AN INDIAN WOMAN'S ELECTION

The following first-hand description of the election campaign of one of the women candidates for a Legislative Council in February, 1937, is here included as it appeared in the Press at that date, because nothing written so long as four years afterwards would so vividly convey the strength of the women's movement in political matters connected both then and still to-day in relation to election for the Legislatures:—

“I write on election day sitting outside various polling booths in Shermadevi Constituency, the only General Constituency in which a woman candidate in Madras Presidency is contesting a seat with men candidates. She is Srimati Lakshmi Ammal, a tried and trusted Congress worker, an ex-gaol citizen, an ex-Vice-President of a Taluk Board, so popular in her district that she was unanimously recommended for the election by

each of the local Congress Boards and grades of Selection Committees.

"For the past six weeks she and her lieutenants have been painting the constituency yellow (the colour of the Congress polling boxes). Her opponent is a very wealthy man, the President of the District Board. But Lakshmi Ammal has the courage of a lioness, unlimited faith in the power of the Congress, and has been a veritable Durga of energy and industry. Her husband, Dr. Shankara Aiyar, is her election agent, and they have formed an ideal team.

"Now is the Day of Test. Over 200 villages have been visited, the majority of an electorate of 56,000 harangued and exhorted, persuaded and directed. It has been an immense work. For some days now I have been absorbed into its maelstrom, typical of the election activity which has shaken and wakened the masses of India from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin.

"It may be called a 'colourful campaign' to such an extent does colour control it, yellow predominantly. The green, yellow and white Congress flag waves everywhere—on trees, houses, poles, bikes, cars and bullock carts, bring-

ing hope, courage and peace, fresh life. Compared with the opposing Party, the Congress has an immense advantage through the attractive advertising and propaganda factors of its symbol, the flag, its slogans and its songs.

"The other Party's dark red flag reminds one only of blood or anger and heaviness. Where are their uplifting community songs ? None exist. Truly the masses are awokened. The crowds at meetings are enormous, beyond anything ever known before. And what contrasts they are ! One has to change one's technique, one's speech for every crowd. One place all are weavers, another shepherds, again makers of brass vessels, or agriculturists, or the sophisticated residents of larger towns, or mill or fisher folk; all sorts and conditions of men, and wonderful numbers of women, too, gather, and the programme of the Congress is so all-round that it is adaptable to every crowd. With the large numbers of women who are voting also this seems as if it was evolving into a women's World. But strange inhibitions still persist amongst the village women. In the presence of men they have an aversion to sitting

down. After the second or third meeting in the same place they manage to break their old custom, and when speakers are late and the men are anxious to keep the women so as to have a big crowd, they manage to persuade the women to sit, and once the old barrier is broken they do not return to their former standing. The same holds good about holding up their hands to vote for a resolution: first confusion and utter shyness, then incredible courage.

"How touching is the patience shown by the crowds? Only so few speakers, these driving from village to village, four and five meetings in morning hours, ditto in night hours. Right into the early hours of the morning from 10 p. m. the crowds are ready to wait. For this the bhajana (community singing of national songs) is popular and helpful. Indeed sometimes the people seem to be 'singing themselves into freedom'. For these election tamashas petromax lights are a boon and a necessity. Loud speakers are not necessary because the meeting places are so quiet and the audiences marvels of silence and self-control. I was thrilled with the beauty of the settings of the meetings, such as one in a

river-bed with a background of mountains; 6,000 people in a grassy opening in a tope; a town square packed full with a squatting crowd and behind its platform the unusual high arched opening to the temple and stairways to the terraces crammed with ladies, and the moon placed perfectly above all, giving shadow effects to enchant an artist patriot.

"The Indian genius for making everything religious displays itself also in this election time. The meeting-place is in this district called the 'Kalyani house'; invitations to it are given as if to a marriage. I saw a large rock-sculptured Genesha freshly painted green, white and orange. Hanuman adorned the Congress handbills. Bharata Mata is the Goddess India, the polling booth her temple, and the walk to vote there a holy pilgrimage.

"There is a remarkable magnetic quality about these waiting village crowds. No matter how jaded we were by long motoring, how bumped to bits (the main roads are excellent, the village roads execrable), no matter how sleepy we were, that welcome in slogans that rent the air, that expectancy, that patience shown and the

previous trouble involved to the thousands of men, women and children, was a recharge to our physical and mental battery. We resurrected for the next half-hour like fresh beings.

"On one of these nights when the fifth meeting was addressed at midnight and we headed for home at nearly 1 a.m., we found that a river had risen 8 feet during the day and there was not the least possibility of fording it. Back we had to drive to a village. Dr. Shankar Aiyar, my escort, translator, and co-speaker, somehow turned into somebody's house which had a large hall. The only bench cot there was chivalrously placed by a window for me, and in five minutes we were all fast asleep. Conventionalities and proprieties simply vanish in such circumstances. At 7 a.m. next morning, after coffee from a neighbouring little 'hotel,' we started off to other villages, and on return the river had fallen to its normal again. The one quality necessary for such campaigning is adjustability.

"Now as I write later, we are driving from polling booth to polling booth collecting figures of the voting. The excitement grows. We

remember that all over the Presidency there is the same excitement. After the epidemic of meetings there is the high fever of the crisis. But Congress wins, wins, wins.

"In one place the workers are intoxicated with victory. They know Lakshmi Ammal has the majority and that the opposing Party's candidate has spent over Rs. 2,000. In another booth the workers have nearly cried to us because the voters are still standing waiting on the roadside some miles away. Can we not send them a bus? They won't be able to walk in time. Alas! we cannot comfort them. No money for conveyances! Then the report, '186 females have voted here, and only six of them voted against Congress.'

"And the gusto with which the story was told of the Congress-minded wife of an opposing worker who had outwitted her husband, got out after he had locked her up for the day, and victoriously recorded her vote for Congress! Then there was the son of the richest man of the town beating the tom-tom himself in his intensity of eagerness to collect the voters to march to the polling booth. Every booth in India has

its own good story. In many places there was certainty that Harijans and very poor voters had taken four annas each from the opposition agents, but there was equal certainty that they had dropped the vote into the yellow box ! The secret ballot will quickly put an end to the secret briber.

“It has been a treat to go round the booths with Lakshmi Ammal. I was moved by the affection and appreciation with which the crowds of voters and volunteers, cyclists, brigades and polling officers regarded her,—no sex-consciousness, no superiority or inferiority complexes here. Her simplicity and sincerity, her capability and common-sense, her unstinted devotion to Congress, have made immediate appeal to them. She has been the psychologically appropriate candidate for the country of Kanya Kumari (the Virgin Goddess) and she has won ! Alas, that our Parliamentary Committees have allowed only one woman candidate in a general constituency in the whole of Madras Presidency ! We women are very grateful to the men of this Constituency who have saved the honour of Congress principles in this matter in this Presidency.

“By the Indian National Congress in Faizpur, by the tours through the villages all over India by Congress leaders, by the voting of the villagers themselves, mass contact has been so intensely made that immense power for Swaraj has been generated. It has only to be touched to be felt. The policy of working the elections has utterly justified itself. The country is aflame for freedom as it so unitedly has never been before. Things are moving at aeroplane speed. It is a grand peaceful fight for liberty. Miracles are happening all round us. The people have spoken. *Vox Populi vox Dei*, the voice of the people from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin is the voice of God.

“(To-day’s results show that Mrs. Lakshmi Sankara Aiyar has won by 21,756 votes to 10,278. *The Hindu*.”

## CHAPTER VI

### WOMEN IN THE INDIAN LEGISLATURES

One of the arguments that constantly crop up in England and America against India's fitness for self-government is that the women of India are treated by Indian men with little respect, are suppressed, kept illiterate, and therefore unfit for a vote or for taking any share in responsible government.

The dictum is also reiterated that a country's level can be judged best by the level of its womanhood, and the conclusion is arrived at that, because Indian women are supposed to be benighted, therefore the Indian nation must be kept in subjection.

Only those who are entirely ignorant can bring up these arguments since the General Election of February, 1937, in India, which brought over eighty Indian women into the expanded legislatures. To-day women's political position gives India the second place in the world

for the number of women elected to the legislatures of the countries—the United States of America being first, with one hundred and forty eight in its State legislatures and two in its Senate. It is true that about 130 women are in political power in Russia, but the Constitution of that country is so different from all others and so unique in its attitude to women that it may be treated as an exception; and thus India is seen as second in world rank.

The emergence of Indian womanhood into the sphere of legislative honour, achievement and action is an incontrovertible demonstration of the fitness of the present time for India's political freedom.

Analysing the women legislators, and taking this vast sub-continent as the United States of India, there is\* one woman Minister, holding the portfolio of Local Self-Government and Public Health in the U. P., two Deputy Speakers in the Madras and Central Provinces; a woman Deputy President in the Assam Legislative Coun-

\* At the writing of this book, 1941. The withdrawal of the Congress Party from the legislatures made cleavages.

cil; Begum Kudsia Rasul, Deputy President of the Legislative Council of the United Provinces; Mrs. Hansa Mehta and Begum Shah Nawaz. Parliamentary Secretaries, and several women Whips of their Parties. Mrs. Subbaroyan was elected much latet the only woman Member of the Central Legislative Assembly. Begum Rasul and Mrs. Hansa Mehta were notable in winning their seats in the Upper Houses in General Constituencies, Muhammadan and Hindu respectively, in contests with men. General (non-reserved) seats (of men and women voters) for the Lower House were contested and won by seven women in the United Provinces and one in Madras Presidency, three of these being non-Congress candidates.

Of the total number of elected women in the Legislatures 36 belonged to the Congress Party, 12 were Muhammadans, others Christians and Independents, one of the latter being a Maharani. In the elections there were some very stiff contests between well-known women leaders, notably that in which Lady Srivastava of Cawnpore was defeated; and in a three-cornered struggle in Lahore. An interesting feature is that at least

in seven instances the husband of the woman legislator is also a member of the Legislature, some pairs being in the same House—the Pandits, the Yakub Hassans, the Munshis, the Subbaroyans—some with the partner in either the higher or lower house. Lady Doctors, or women who are wives of Doctors, are the most numerous amongst the groups; teachers rank next, amongst whom is Mrs. Rastore who defeated her own University Vice-Chancellor.

There are remarkable absences of outstanding women in the Legislatures. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu is not there. She is, like Gandhiji and Nehruji, a Super-Member of them all and therefore not to be limited to election for any one locality. It is remarkable and sad that the Socialist Party did not manage to get any of its women members elected, and so neither Srimati Kamaladevi nor Srimati Satyavati has legislative standing. It is most regrettable that Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi, first woman Council Member in the Provinces, and first Deputy Speaker of a Legislature in the world, has found no place amongst the present women members, owing to difficulties of Party technique. She

had done splendid legislative work for the abolition of the Devadasis, a system of dancing-girls linked to temple service. Almost all the married women legislators have children over seven years old. The child of one Legislative woman member spent a term in jail with its mother between 1930 and 1932.

How small in comparison with Indian figures (80) seem the numbers of women sitting in Legislative bodies in other countries ! Britain has only 9 women M. P's., Australia 4. Before the present war Sweden had 11, Denmark 7, Czecko-Slovakia 8 in her Chamber, 5, in her Senate, and Finland, the first country to enfranchise women, a total of 16. And there is the stranger fact in face of all these numbers that there is not to-day a woman voter, much less a woman legislator, in France, Italy, Switzerland, Nazi Germany or Japan ! These Indian women functioned for three years in Legislatures of which eight were run by Congress Governments.

Seeing that the Indian number is so creditably large compared with other world figures, was it likely that the Indian group would have made any notable contribution to Indian

public life through their influence in the Legislatures? Do they represent strength or weakness? If all the women members had been in one Assembly they might have done much, but their division up in Provinces reduced their effect, and only by the force of personality did they influence legislation. How could 8 women, among 200 men, or 3 women amongst 150 men, achieve miracles? They were also bound by Party affiliations on most questions, or by the authority which had nominated them in the case of nominated women.

Their strength lay in the valuable services which they could render the nation concerning subjects on which they were primarily qualified to agitate. The following were the specific subjects included in the 8-fold programme of legislation drafted by the All-India Women's Conference to which the women legislators subscribed: a high single standard of morality for men and women alike, equal pay for equal work irrespective of sex, an adequate All-India Maternity Service, the abolition of Child Marriage, increase in facilities for the education of girls so that the present disparity by which six

times as many boys as girls are educated should be removed, an adequate Maternity Benefit Bill, a Social Insurance Act; all general fundamental questions needing urgent legislation from the women's point of view—and women are half of the nation. The women's electorate, now over five millions, has been, however, only recently aroused to political action, and that naturally enough on the emotional tide of the intense need of the country's freedom from foreign domination, and through women's devotion to Gandhiji as the country's leader. The women voters have still to be educated with regard to the contribution women can further make to the progress of the nation through nation building on matters that affect themselves intimately and fundamentally.

There is a weakness worth noticing in the large and creditable number of Indian women legislators. The women members are the product of a faulty and artificial system of reservation of seats, of communal electorates, and of a property and "wifehood" vote, all of which had been protested against by women's organisations. If these extraneous props, forced on

women from the British side probably from well-meant motives, are taken away, as must occur when in the future fear and depreciatory complexes cease to operate, then this present high figure of women legislators will come toppling down. The experience of other countries (except Russia), proves that where there is a free field men seize the monopoly of political power for themselves for many reasons, some legitimate, but most selfish, and women have difficulty in getting even a footing in public life. The fewness of the Indian women who were given the chance to contest general seats in the General Election of 1937 supports the sad prophecy. There is also a weakness in the method of selecting the women candidates, so much so that it is not inaccurate to say that Indian women legislators to-day are predominantly the representatives of men and of their communal bias, and their way of playing the political game, rather than of women's votes or views. Only when there is adult franchise and when women become as economically free as men, will it be possible to develop a large group of women legislators truly representative of

Indian women's ideology. Now (1941) most of these women (the Congress members) are in jail, and their direct influence on law-making is checked, though indirectly they show that women place the freedom of India as a first necessity. For the  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years in which all the women members functioned in the Legislatures they proved to be chiefly voters with men in Party divisions more like echoes and sheep than creators of a new social and economic order. Nevertheless exceptional women there are in India as in every country, and the Congress Party particularly may be proud that it has given women equal opportunities with men in the principles of its Programme enunciated at Karachi in 1928, and that it helped them to gain new and valuable experience in even the cribbed and cabined new India Constitution of 1935. Women who made good under these limited conditions will have a better chance of being treated still more fairly in future improved conditions. The Indian women legislators were, during their years of service, a credit to the nation, and a guarantee of progress in an all-round human development of freedom, peace and happiness.

With the advent of the European war in September 1939 the Congress Governments in 8 Provinces found themselves thrust aside by the British military machine and its necessities. India was forced without word or warning to provide men and materials for a war about which she was not consulted. Her Premiers and Ministers were flouted and ignored. It was evident that Provincial Autonomy was a sham rather than a reality. Men and women of the Congress Party could not serve in conditions which degraded them, and in November 1940 the 8 Congress Governments resigned in protest. The women Councillors in Indian States and Non-Congress Provinces continue their work as before. Since then the women in the other legislatures have toured their constituencies and taken part in local political Congresses. Mrs. Pandit attended by invitation all meetings of the Congress Working Committee. Mrs. Lakshmipathi was a member of the Congress Delegation on Trade and Education to Japan, other members gave much time to the Women's Sub-Committee work of the National Planning Committee.

In December 1940 the Congress Legislators started courting imprisonment by opposing the British war policy in India and all war on principle and as propaganda for the technique of Non-co-operating, Non-Violence, which Mahatma Gandhi, their leader, holds before the world as the only alternative to the continuance of brutal and brutalising modern war. The Congress women Legislators have shown themselves as enthusiastic as the men in volunteering for the suffering which jail life entails. Women, old and young; rich and poor, have left all at the call of the ideal of freedom for their country, and proved again as they did in 1929-1933 that they cling neither to old conventions, to ties of affection or ordinary prestige, nor the lure of retaining legislative office, nor security from loss of money, health or position, when all these are weighed against their desire to do their utmost to win independence for India from foreign domination.

## CHAPTER VII

### INDIAN WOMANHOOD AND CHANGING EDUCATION

Paraphrasing Emerson's saying, "The world is a symbol, in the whole and in all its parts," it seems to me that "India is a paradox, in the whole and in all its parts." Mixing with the life of the Indian people in their homes, in festivals, in politics, amongst rich and poor and all castes and communities, I have found such gentle character, such nuances of refinement, such inherent intelligence, such response to traditional art and culture, that it is difficult to realise the hard fact that to-day this great, ancient people has the lowest percentage of literacy in the world. It has the fewest schools, the least money spent on education, the least national system of education, and the most wrong attitude to education. Proportionate to its population it has the fewest number of its youth in schools and colleges, the fewest literate adults of any civilised nation.

on the face of the earth. The paradox of its present lack of literacy but presence of civilisation, intelligence, and refinement; its wisdom without science; its heritage of the ages without ability to read or write its own languages, is unnatural and untrue to its long history. It is on record in an official educational Report of 1838 that there existed then in Bengal and Bihar as many as 100,000 schools, that is, about one school for every 400 children. In 1912 G. K. Gokhale stated that there was at his time only one school for every six villages in India. By 1930 there were only 5 literate women in Bihar out of every 1,000 Bihari women! There are to-day (1941) only 5,000 odd institutions in all India intended solely for the education of girls.

Before the East India Company took over the government of India and later transferred it to the British Government, "the large number of indigenous schools were religious in character and regarded knowledge as the means of spiritual growth."

The English new-comers criticised the old system as ridiculous. Under the influence of Macaulay, English was established as the language

of the Court and the Government, and enforced as the medium of instruction in High Schools. The whole aim of education was forcibly wrested by a foreign people and a foreign policy from reverence for knowledge as a means of improving character, to looking on it as a means for gaining Government jobs. By degrees teaching became a system of dictating simple notes that could be easily crammed for the purpose of passing the Government public examinations. In all this transition the plight of the education of girls became worse and worse, for they did not need English for their future destiny of wife and mother, nor for jobs in those years, nor did a secular type of education attract the parents for their girls; and, to cap all, the pucca schools built by the foreign Government were meant for boys alone, and it is only very recently that a movement for co-education has become popular and has been permitted by the authorities. But in both schools and colleges where co-education exists, girls come in as an extra, they feel on sufferance, and their optional subjects and their physical culture training are not given facilities equal to those of the boy students.

In reference to education, a résumé of the divisions of the population throws interesting light on the education of women. There is almost cent per cent literacy amongst the girls and women of the Parsi community and the Christian community. The first-mentioned number only 100,000 in all and are located almost entirely in Bombay. The Christians (Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Syrian) number  $6\frac{1}{2}$  million or 1.97 per cent of the population. During the past sixty years the ranks of women teachers and women hospital nurses have been almost entirely recruited from among the Christian-missionary-educated girls, and they are still the invaluable mainstay of these services. Christian parents not only see that all their girls are educated but they encourage them to pass on their education in altruistic and wage-earning service to others.

The women of the Brahmin caste have thought it their religious duty to know how to read and write, and carry on the dharma of reverence for the Guru, who as teacher and priest belongs to the highest caste of Hinduism. But there are only ten million Brahmins in the 270 odd millions of Hindus. Thus the ratio of Brahmin girls

to the total is very small, and is further reduced because it is in this caste that the custom of early marriage was compulsory, and the girls who had barely learned how to read and write and who were growing to love their schooling, were withdrawn from school at about twelve years of age. Unfortunately this still very largely continues. After twelve they are brought back into the home until they are married. A new custom is, however, now coming into vogue, namely, that these young married girls, after the birth of the first baby, the "duty-child," take up their studies again and try bravely and often successfully to take their academical degree. The granting of Government scholarships to young widows has also been a beneficent and practical policy taken advantage of chiefly by Brahmin widows. Brahmin women have always been keen on going on pilgrimages; and undoubtedly they imbibe education in another way by such travels and contacts with wide varieties of people and experiences.

The Muhammadan women attain a fair literacy in their own language as it is obligatory amongst their community that each boy and

girl shall know how to read the Koran in Arabic. But the prevalence of the purdah system among these women keeps them within their zenana walls, denies them fresh air and freedom of movement, and dooms their masses to an appallingly high percentage of ill-health, and of mortality from childbirth. There have been a few localities in India (such as Sind) where the purdah custom has recently been dramatically discarded, but not sufficiently to shake the deplorable custom to its foundations as in Turkey and Persia. Without such a reform the Muslim sisters will lag behind all India. As there are seventy million Muhammadans in the country it is very important that their women should be encouraged to come out of purdah, and enjoy the advantages of education, for they are an intelligent and artistic people.

It is heart-breaking to think of the unschooled condition of the women of the non-Brahmin millions of Hindus. These are the women of the agricultural areas, the women of the great tea and coffee estates, of the cotton, coir, and jute areas, of the factories, cities, and mines. Then there are also the still lower class of women

WORKERS, coolies, stone-breakers, scavengers. In other countries the girl children of these classes go to school, learn how to read, write and count. Here in India they are all unschooled. I have often turned into a village school and found only one girl amongst fifty boys, and she was there because she was the daughter of the headmaster! Only a politically free country having control over its own finances and initiative can ever even begin to grapple with such a vast problem as the liquidating of the illiteracy of these millions and millions of India's masses (Hindu and Muhammadan) of the working classes. The whole current mentality possessing them about education has to be completely revolutionised. They think to-day that education for a girl is useless, a waste of time, and disturbing to their thoughts. Also as the mothers are so poor that they must leave the homes and earn money, the girl children must look after the smaller youngsters and the home during their absence. When I was once holding forth about the need for compulsory primary education, an Indian girl college student who was nearing the completion of her Medical degree asked me, "But what is the use of edu-

tion for them all? There won't be enough jobs for them." I was horrified at her lack of response to the idea of education as a birthright, the idea that holds in other countries, Ireland, England, Russia, America, Japan. Yet I knew hers is the general view which holds to-day in Indian society, for to-day's curriculum is out of focus with everyday needs. The problem is how we are to revolutionise it.

Before I deal with changes that are actually taking place I will set out a concise group of statistics about girls' education in India to-day (1941): Only 1 out of every 100 of India's girls gets primary education; only 1 out of every 1,000 girls gets secondary education. In twenty years the percentage of literacy of Indian women has not risen from 2 to 3%. Six times as many boys receive education as girls, fourteen times as much money being spent on the boys as on the girls. Even then only 13% of the manhood of India is literate. Altogether about 20 million men and 4 million women are literate. These figures refer to literacy in the mother tongue. There is only one per cent total of literacy in English and this is confined predominantly to towns.

Only 8% of Indian revenues is devoted to elementary education (for 350 million people). Britain spends 86 crores for 40 million, and the United States 347 crores for 130 million. Gokhale claimed that two-thirds of the national revenues should be spent on education. In pre-war years England spent 12% of her revenues on her defence, Switzerland 9%, U. S. A. 14%. India's expenditure on the army was 25%; and army, law and order, and administration together consumed over 50% of the Central and Provincial Indian revenues.

Within this general conspectus of depressing figures a number of changes are to be noted as now taking place. The tidal wave of interest in science-subjects in higher education has almost submerged the older domination of literary subjects. But alas, one finds that it is only a change of fashion in book knowledge, and the lack of practical application of chemistry and physics and botany and such subjects to daily life is deplorable. Now again the tide of fashion is setting in for vocational and technical subjects. At least these are getting more to grips with the needs of the country, and bring

a fresh breeze into the stuffy atmosphere of girls' studies of the past twenty years. They have also opened the door to the medical profession for those fortunate few girls who are strong enough and brainy enough and brave enough to complete the difficult, costly and long degree courses.

It remained the happy privilege of the All-India Women's Conference, called together first in 1926, specifically to initiate reforms in the educational system, particularly in the curriculum of girls, to bring into existence a new type of College for Indian girls, the Lady Irwin Home Science College in New Delhi, which opened in November, 1932. Its aim is to enable women to utilise the advantages of Science in their homes and to add to them the loveliness of Art interwoven with "that particular heritage which is embodied in India's own culture and tradition, in its national games and dances, arts and crafts, sagas and songs, and spiritual aspirations." This College has taken a firm hold on groping desires of parents for a curriculum for their girls that is both "natural and national," and fits the young women to be new types of

teachers, up-to-date home-makers and mothers, and capable organisers of public services such as their new status as citizens demands.

Another of the aims of this growing and popular College is the restoration to teachers of the high status in society that used to be theirs in olden times. All through the country the women teachers are amongst the most capable of the country's women. This was recognised when the authorities chose women teachers as the officers to be in charge of the polling booths for women in the General Election for the Legislative Assemblies and Councils in 1937, when for the first time 5,000,000 women were entitled to vote. In demanding that teachers should be considered as high in the social scale as wives of officials of higher or lesser degree, or as relatives of rich landlords or merchants, the College will do a great service to women who are amongst its pioneers in these Dark Ages of India's literacy, and who together with its women Hospital Nurses, Sisters, Health workers of all kinds, and Doctors, need social reinstatement on the highest level. The old days are quickly passing when the woman member of the

joint family who went into the mixed magnetism of differing castes met together in a school or public service, was not allowed to cook the household food or mix among the household after returning from her public work unless and until she had a bath and changed her sari. There exists still too much of caste and class snobbery which only truer education, purer patriotism, applied science and more real spirituality will cause to disappear.

The return to favour of co-education is a very hopeful sign of the times and promises to bridge the unnatural gulf that has existed between the sexes in India since the end of the Buddhist era. In South India to-day there are more girls than boys in what are technically called Elementary Schools for Boys ! And daily the number of girls flocking to Boys' Colleges is increasing so rapidly that in some Colleges on the Malabar Coast, S. India, a limiting quota for girls has been fixed, which again shows how discrimination detrimental to the education of girls is still in our midst. The changes proposed in the Wardha Scheme of Basic Education threatened to shorten the number of years of the

schooling of girls and to defeat its purpose by allowing girls to stop their education at twelve before they had completed their training in any basic artcraft, such as spinning, though boys had the advantage of a compulsory number of years of training during which they became sufficiently expert to be able to earn their living through that craft.

A good deal has been done by the Central Advisory Board on Education to prevent such a retrograde step in the midst of so much proposed necessary reform based on racial need and character in fundamental mass literacy.

Girls themselves are hungry for school and college; their mothers, having been denied education themselves, try to secure it for their girls as a rule in the towns these days; and young men of the middle and upper classes insist on securing educated brides, amongst whose accomplishments should be music. These are all steps in the right direction, but there is not evident in India the dynamic, active zeal of the few who are literate, to teach all the ignorant, which characterised the Revolution in Russia, nor the drive of a complete self-directed Government which compelled every

village in Japan to have primary schools, and compelled every child to attend those schools, and provided the finance for what Japanese statesmanship saw to be a modern necessity and the soundest investment for their country.

One sincerely hopes that young men and women students themselves who are to-day full of patriotic emotion and enthusiasm will influence the educational authorities to include as part of their qualifications for passing the School Final tests and the academical degrees at least one year of successful teaching in schools for the masses. This would impress on students the responsibility of passing on their own advantages as a National Educational Trust and a privileged opportunity of constructive national service. The presence of such a new cadre of teachers would bridge the gulf between the educated and the masses; would raise the whole social status of teachers; and also break down the barriers of pride and salaries between various grades of teachers; it would ensure a longer period of years for the education of girls; it would reinstate the honour to woman of being "the first Guru."

When that first Woman's Conference on Educational Reform met in 1927, the first Reform it demanded was that "Moral training, based on spiritual ideals, should be made compulsory for all schools and colleges". This still remains the ideal of all-Indian womanhood as the foundation on which all change in education should be based.

## CHAPTER VIII

### INDIAN WOMEN EMERGENT IN THE ARTS

Indian women have always had means whereby they showed their love of Beauty, their desire to express Beauty, their capacity to create Beauty. The way that women add "the little more, and how much it is" to the basic needs of clothing, food, shelter, is the expression of their fundamental "Art of Living." For instance, their choice of harmonies in colour, their designs in decorating the texture which they choose, their style in the several varieties of costume worn in different climates of India, all suitable to the different needs of the areas concerned; their refined addition of flowers to life—in the hair, in garlands, in bouquets, in ceremonial offerings, in decorations of all kinds for festivals and celebrations and worship: their daily freehand drawing of geometrical invocatory designs on the prepared ground outside the doorway to the homes, called

variously kolam, alpana, tangoli, is the basis of the expressive defining line which is in the blood-stream of the pictorial artists of the ages of India, practised every morning at dawn by the servant or the mother of the household with chalk or rice powder; the love of chanting, of dramatic stories, of poems which keep the children clinging to the old grandmother who retails them; the joy of children and men and maidens in rhythmic motions and in beating the simple little drums on the night of Maha-Siva-Ratri, or of the Garbha-dance, or Krishna-lila dances at marriage times: everywhere in India the natural use of most expressive gestures of hands, arms, eyes; all these details and innumerable others demonstrate the Woman as Artist. In these she is unsophisticated and largely spontaneous or traditional.

In no country have I come across such a love of Drama as in India. Indeed so naturally and so joyously does any given group of people undertake the acting and production of a "drama," a play, a semi-opera, that I have often called play-acting the national game of India, as is cricket that of England, or base-ball of America. There

is no awkwardness in boys and girls when in their schools to-day they perform their old well-known stories. They are born actors. Yet all this may in these days be classed as artistic instinct and natural refinement in taste rather than trained skill in the Arts such as is a feature of the life and education of other countries.

For hundreds of years past the great wealth of detailed technique in the arts of music and dancing was taught to one special class of women, generally named "Devadasis," (Deity-devotees). Because these special women were hereditary servants of the temples, they had an assured economic position, and traditional men-teachers were also available to give them technical training in the arts of music and dancing. Alas, through the frailty, selfishness and sensuality of human nature, and the abdication by man of his privilege to be the chivalrous protector of woman, these women, though the custodians of the beauties of Art, became identified with a reputation of easy virtue. This reacted against the arts themselves, and twenty years ago music was not allowed to be taught in girls' schools; and as for dancing, only nautch girls

might think of such improper rhythmic movements !

The change that has swept through this land and that now encourages all girls to learn music and dancing is almost miraculous. A revival of all styles of traditional Indian dancing is found all over India. It began through the natural, pure, paternal way in which, so long ago as in 1917, Rabindranath Tagore was training his student boys and girls in Santiniketan to dance and act together in his beautiful plays. In Bombay Mrs. Leila Sokey, wife of one of the most outstanding medical men there, took up the art of dancing in a pioneer spirit, and, well known as Menaka, later gained renown for India in Europe and America in a most successful tour. In southernmost Trivandrum, Thankamoni, wife and dancing partner of Gopinath, has shown how the development and modernisation of the ancient styles of dancing can revivify and inspire the great Pauranic stories. The dance recitals of Srimati Rukmini Devi of Madras are a spiritual experience. She is an exponent of genius of the ancient art of Bharata Natya, and has made it her dedicated service of renascent

India to restore the joy of the dancing God Nataraja to the life of the Indian people. Herself a Brahmin and the wife of the President of the Theosophical Society, a woman of much travel and culture, she has raised the whole atmosphere, environment and reputation of the public performance of music and dance by young women.

Music has been rescued from identification with the barber class of musicians. Educationists had for years deplored its absence from the school and college curricula. Much propaganda has resulted in a new attitude to the value of this art for training the emotional nature of youth, and for bringing its beauty into home and public life. Music and painting have now secured a place in some Universities as optional subjects for special diplomas and for degrees.

The gramophone first brought into prominence the famous modern women singers and veena players. Of these the best known of South India are Dhanammal, lately passed away, and M. Sundarambal, the creator of Nandanar, and of Bengal, Kananbala. As a singer of Hindi songs Shanta Apte has achieved all-India fame

for her beautiful voice and sincere, artistic performances of film characters. Quite a remarkable number of girls of very respectable families are now joining the film companies and making good in this difficult modern vocation. Of course there is more privacy in rehearsing in the various stages of building up and "shooting" a film performance than in singing and acting a music-drama to a crowded theatre, especially when one remembers that all women's parts have been taken by men in India and Japan for hundreds of years past. The steps by which India's young women have come into the full glare of publicity as public entertainers have disclosed themselves as part of the cultural unfoldment of these days in the most natural way. First came the newly-organised Music Conferences from 1912, and girl competitors were encouraged to appear for competitions and performances organised in connection with these Conferences. Then gramophone companies persuaded the best of the girl and women musicians to allow gramophone records to be taken of their best solos. Next came the invitations of the radio stations for these same artistes

to give half-hourly or longer recitals. These also were semi-private in the actual performances in the studios. Then came the applications for film engagements. These take real talent, and the demands of the part itself sort out would-be film stars. I have no doubt that within a few years we shall see many of these same women becoming ambitious to try their powers on the "legitimate" stage, and eventually becoming actresses and opera singers as famous as were Ellen Terry and Tetrazzini and Madame Melba in the Western world, and becoming also the means of raising the standard of all Indian dramas.

I recently found myself travelling by train with one of these new products, the local lady film star of a mofussil town. She was about 22 years old, alert in manner but not at all pushing. Rather she showed that natural poise which I have noted in Indian women in all the new situations into which this new era has suddenly pushed them without any previous training. The way Indian women act as Honorary Bench Magistrates, each sitting with three or four men magistrates and not the least shy,

frightened or other than competent, is another instance of the same inherent capacity. My film heroine was dressed in a simple black silk sari with a fine white line as design. She wore little jewellery, but a pair of costly diamond bangles were unavoidably noticeable. She had had two Indian men friends to see her off, but she was travelling alone. She was reading a Film magazine in Tamil. She was free and friendly with me as far as our mutual limitations of language allowed. Her only anxiety was about a small tin suit-case. She confided to me that her jewellery was in it. It did not upset her in the least that she had to climb up into the upper berth of the second class carriage. She was ready for anything. Each of these details expresses the gulf separating old and new. I was very pleased with her. I mention her because she was typical of the emergent artistes of her generation. The adventure, the novelty, the freedom, the sense of creativeness, all carry these girls along naturally and without self-consciousness in this brave new world of art-production in which they find themselves comrades with young men of similar impulses.

The Pauranic type of story, which still is most popular with Indian audiences, and which retains a sense of intercommunication with beings of a higher world, keeps the tone of this new world of art-production on a higher level than the materialism, or mere sex appeal, gangsterdom, and sensationalism of the Western stage performances which reach India. Nor has crude commercialism as yet gripped this "Young Party" which chiefly creates the new entertainments of India to-day, in dancing as well as dramatic productions. The spiritual effects of "Mappillai," "Tulsirama," "Nandanar," of Devika Rani in the "Life of the Buddha" and the "Life of Gandhi", show the high nature of Indian leadership in the Arts, and explain also how there has been such ease and such naivété in the way Indian women have taken their modern place in the public display of music, dance and drama.

Toru Dutt of Bengal was the first woman within the last century whose poetry touched the public imagination. She did not live long enough to fulfil the promise of her springtime. The exquisite lyrics of Sarojini Naidu are world-famous. Her genius as a poetess raised all

womanhood with her. The music of her masterly English, the sweep and gamut of her emotional expression, its daintiness, its depth, refinement, sensitiveness, choice of beautiful metaphors, patriotism exceed my power of adequate praise. I must quote one of her most loved songs.—

### LEILI

The serpents are asleep among the poppies,  
The fire-flies light the soundless panther's way  
To tangled paths where shy gazelles are  
straying,

And parrot-plumes outshine the dying day.  
O soft ! The lotus-buds upon the stream  
Are stirring like sweet maidens when they  
dream.

A caste-mark on the azure brows of Heaven,  
The golden moon burns sacred, solemn,  
bright.

The winds are dancing in the forest temple,  
And swooning at the holy feet of night.  
Hush ! in the silence mystic voices sing  
And make the gods their incense-offering.

No Indian woman dramatist of this era has yet emerged, but thirty years ago Miss Cornelia

Sorabji and Mrs. Ghosal were story-tellers of distinction and literary charm. Miss Sita Devi, daughter of Mr. Ramananda Chatterji of the *Modern Review*, has carried on their tradition of literature, and Mrs. Kamini Roy early made a place for herself as a writer of Bengali verse.

The art of painting has attracted a number of India's young women, especially at the Kala Bhawan of Santiniketan, in the Bombay, Lahore and Lucknow Schools of Art, and in the art studios of Ahmedabad; but so far none of outstanding ability or originality has impressed herself on the public. But Pratima Devi, daughter-in-law of Rabindranath Tagore, Sukumari Devi, Sunyani Devi, Krishnabai of Rajamundry, the sister of the famous Ukil brothers of Delhi, and some of the girl pupils of Mr. Rawal of Ahmedabad, have shown by their pictures that the renaissance of Indian painting has found channels in these artistic souls, though not to the remarkable extent that it has expressed itself through Indian men artists. But has not this been the state of artistic affairs in painting in all countries up to the present date?

It is by their Arts that countries receive highest honour and achieve most lasting remembrance. It is also maintained that the status of a country is measured by the status of its women. Art is a continuous process of the life of a country—not of a moment or an era in its history. It is the high-water mark of its inherent culture. That India's women have become such able exponents of the revival of the evergreen Arts of Bharatavarsha in modern days and ways gives assurance of the future high place of India in world civilisation.

## CHAPTER IX

### CHANGING VALUES FOR INDIAN WOMANHOOD

#### ILLUSTRATIONS FROM LIFE

In this section of my account of the changes I have seen take place in the life of my Indian sisters in the twenty-five years and more during which I have happily lived amongst them, I want to vary my technique for the conveyance of the information. It is not in the plan of this Series of books of Kitabistan that they shall have pictorial illustrations. But I love pictures, and find myself always attracted to look first at the illustrated page of newspapers, and the illustrations in books. Let me, knowing that mine is a common weakness, therefore give life a chance of drawing pictures of events which have happened, which are happening in these years, which earlier seemed impossible of occurrence by custom, or law, or lack of woman's capacity or desire or courage. Each of the following illustrations in words is

not an isolated exception, but a true happening typical of the lead of the pioneer souls in a rapidly changing era in India.

### *Anti-Purdah Pageant*

What is this procession of women led by Marwari girls riding on horseback, followed by a car driven by a Marwari woman, and by many, many more Marwari women walking? All this is a sight unique in Calcutta streets. It is the occasion of the annual Anti-Purdah Women's Conference which was attended this year (1941) by 5,000 women, of whom a record number came out of purdah for the first time.

### *Anti-Polygamy*

The occasion is a meeting for the women workers of one of the largest cotton mills in Coimbatore City, Madras Presidency. By invitation of the mill owners the delegates to the Tamil Nad Women's Conference, held in that city, and the members of the Reception Committee, met over 300 of the mill-women and almost as many men in the mill gardens, and were given *chota hazri* (breakfast) at 7-30

a.m. During the speeches following, one of the delegates sent by the Trades Union of Madura, herself a worker in Madura textile mill, appealed to the Conference to press for the passing of a law that would prevent polygamy. "The men mill-workers, Hindus and Muslims, all alike, are marrying two and more women," she said passionately, "only to get our wages, to grow rich out of us. We have a miserable life. Save us, sisters."

### *A Modern Pioneer Widow*

All the orthodox customs of centuries were transmuted into higher values when a certain office-bearer of the All-India Women's Conference one year refused to allow the most poignant and shattering grief to swerve her from carrying out capably and courageously her duties as Standing Committee Member for the Annual Session. South Indian women do not wear their sarees over their head. As she walked on the dais only a fortnight after the passing away of her husband, a pang of compassion went through every heart at sight of her pale, beautiful, spiritualised face, while pride in her conscientious sense of service

and duty, and a sense of relief at the sight of her unshaven coils of black hair and unbroken bangles and other adornments which old times would have forbidden to widows (save the absence of the *puttu* marks), raised the spiritual potential of everyone present. It gave unforgettable witness of the liberation that the leadership that the Women's organisation is giving to such bereaved ones.

### *Adult Literacy*

She is a slight Brahmin woman with a bright intellectual face. She carries a young child on one hip, a Badminton bat in the other hand, and an English Primer under her arm. She hurries down the village street as usual three afternoons a week to the ladies' afternoon classes in a small country town. She is the wife of the local School Inspector. Suddenly to-day a strange wandering beggar starts laughing loudly at her, and makes sneering remarks, and people turn to stare at her. She looks to neither right nor left, but as she reaches the gateway of our class-hall she bursts into tears. "I can never come again, Mrs. Cousins. He is mocking at

me. I can't bear it." We comforted her. But what trials these sensitive, aspiring souls are going through within and outside the home in these transition times! I accompanied her to the next few classes. She won her battle against ridicule. The beggar moved to the next town.

### *Child Marriage*

She was one of the cleverest girls in a co-educational High School. She was talented in music, a favourite performer on the violin and singer at public performances. Her father was one of the foremost supporters of social reform in the town. The staff were expecting that this smart child would finish her S. L. C. or Matriculation. She wanted to do so herself. What was their consternation on return from their summer holidays to hear that, despite the fact that her age, signed in the admission register, showed that she was still under fourteen, her father had allowed her to be married to a student relative. The parents trusted to public apathy to see them through. The father boasted that the child would continue her studies. The

consummation should not take place, he said, until the husband got his degree. All eye-wash! She was in the family way within a year !

### *Divorce*

She is a Brahmin young woman. All the dreams and ideals of a marriage that had started in happiness and love have been shattered. Their marriage had been a registered one, as well as in the orthodox Hindu ceremonial. It gave her the opportunity to seek for a divorce. How could she go through the publicity ? Not for herself, but for the sake of the future of their child she steeled herself to face the rending of personal privacy, the misrepresentation of divorce proceedings. She won freedom without stain for herself and the child. Hindu women cannot gain such release unless they and their friends have been wise enough to "register" their marriages.

### *Inter-dining*

Twenty years ago it was difficult to get twenty women of different castes to dine together. It is Bangalore City. Where is this stream of

women flowing in all kinds of vehicles at 8 p.m.? Within half an hour you may see over 700 women sitting in long rows in the specially covered courtyard of the High School all enjoying their evening meal together. Hindus and Muslims, Christians and Parsees, Brahmins and non-Brahmins, eating vegetarian food together, self-released from inter-dining restrictions of community or caste, happy in their unity of sisterhood and cosmopolitanism and the ahimsa of their tasty menu.

### *The Satyagrahi Husband*

A man of about thirty told me that during the Non-co-operation movement of 1929-32 his wife was so eager to follow Gandhiji to prison, and he thought her devotion to the freedom of the country and to the leader so magnificent, that he helped her to jail by willingly taking his food every day, while she was locked up, from the "hotel" adjacent to their cottage—we all know what a sacrifice that was on his part.

\* \* \*

The Press announced one day this year that at the trial of a Satyagrahi woman for shouting

anti-war slogans, the Court called her husband as one of the witnesses against her. He said that he was proud to state that he had carried his wife's letter to the Magistrate intimating her intention of breaking the Defence of India Act !

The modern Indian husband is working up to the precedent of F. W. Pethick Lawrence, M.P., who in the militant suffragette days unintentionally drew public laughter against himself when, after the Government arrested his wife, he said he would donate a pound sterling a day to the suffragette organisation for every day his wife was kept in prison !

### *The Bicycle a Liberator of Women*

Poona is a paradise for women and girls on bicycles. Not because the roads are good. They are not. They are narrow and twisty and always crowded with people and horse-vehicles. But the Maharashtra women are strong and brave, practical and independent and thrifty, and when they got to grips with the problem of free, speedy, and cheap methods of getting about and found that the bicycle fulfilled all the requirements,

they took to it like ducks to water. The climate is favourable through the year and the city distances are not too long. You see these women cyclists everywhere, unescorted, free as the air, performing feats of self-preservation at every corner, afraid of nothing and no one, and reaching their destinations exhilarated, safe and sound. For bicycles Poona is a second Oxford!

But imagine this other true snapshot taken in Imperial Delhi. A man of about 30 years old is cycling towards the railway station. His stout, sonsy wife with her sari over her hair and all well wrapped up is plumbly seated on his carrier behind, holding on to his coat and looking as pleased as Punch! The sight was evidently common. No one looked round except me. A report of Phaltan co-educational High School stated that 60 girl students cycled to the school daily!

### *The Indian Woman Motorist*

Little Mrs. Mukerji was the first Indian woman I saw driving a motor car. She was a pioneer as she guided that motor through the difficult old streets of Patna in 1920, she and I

alone in the car. I admired the courage of her professor husband in acquiescing in her courage, and his faith in her capacity. I realised then that there were unfathomed powers in my Indian sisters. It might take time, but they would accomplish whatever they set their heart on doing.

In 1939 as I was admiring the Kanya Kumari Temple at the ocean's edge in Cape Comorin a big touring car packed with adults and children came down the street and drew up beside me. To my surprise the driver was a girl of about 18 who looked a typical college student. I was so pleased that I asked her had she come far. The oldish man on the far side said, "She is my daughter. She has driven us forty miles down the difficult road of the Wynad tea estates." All over the country women and girls are freely and skilfully driving their husbands and their fathers, and rejoicing in the power of freedom of movement. That engineer father was proud of his girl.

And to-day they have conquered the air also, for a number of Indian women are proud possessors of the "A" class Air Pilot's certificate.

*The Rising Graph of Physical Culture*

In Calcutta I admired a brilliant display of Indian Village folk-dancing by young women members of the Bratachari Movement of whom the organiser and galvaniser is Mr. G. C. Dutt.

In Benares ten years ago I watched with deep pleasure the skill in a Ju-Jitsu display of girls and boys of Santiniketan directed by a Japanese expert. It was during the first All-Asian Educational Conference.

A notable institution in Baroda which specialises in physical culture for girls, the Arya Kanya Maha Vidyalaya, sends forty of its pupils touring all over India giving public displays which leave audiences gaping at their strength, skill, precision and grace.

With what pleasure the boy and girl students are increasingly taking part in mixed doubles in College Tennis Tournaments ! "No soft serves to us in future, please !" the girls call out.

Nowadays a Women's Club for Recreation, including Badminton and Tennis, is a *sine qua non* of any town, small or large, which desires to be considered progressive.

Perhaps the strangest place where Indian women played Badminton was in a slip of ground, the exact size needed, between the Maternity Lying-in-Ward and the Morgue in a Women's Prison during the 1930 Non-co-operation campaign !

### *A Woman Magistrate's Experience*

It was after women got the vote, the hallmark of citizenship, that they also got such promotion in legal status as to receive Government nomination as Honorary Bench Magistrates. Hundreds of Indian women are now serving in that capacity.

It was in line with women's "sweet reasonableness" that the woman magistrate sitting with the panel of three men magistrates should request the Bench President to allow her to speak to the half dozen young men who were charged with being drunk and disorderly so that she might try and persuade them to reform. As she stopped addressing them, imagine her surprise when they all got down on their knees promising "Amma and Swami" that they would improve if pardoned ! Alas, the fine was imposed despite

the gesture! I was that Woman Magistrate for five years.

### *Honour for Women Municipal Councillors*

Twenty years ago Indian women were not entitled to vote in Municipal or other elections. Here is a scene reported this year (1941). In the important city of Berhampore in the north of Andhradesa, an election is in process for the position of Vice-President of its Municipal Council. The one woman member of the Council is proposed as a candidate. She is opposed by three men, one of them an ex-President. The result of the first count is a draw. One man withdraws. There is a second count and again there is a draw between two men and the lady. In the third count the lady wins by twelve votes to ten. Her elder sister and her brother became Members of the Madras Legislative Assembly. Both are now Congress prisoners. Ten years ago this new woman Vice-President was herself a prisoner in the Non-Co-operation agitation, and her first baby was born during her jail term in the jail Maternity ward.

*Recognition of the economic value of women's work in  
the homes*

"A man's work is from sun to sun,  
But a woman's work is never done."

So runs an old English saying. The work of the woman who leaves her home for the school, the hospital, the factory, brings her within the category of technical "worker," and being a paid employee she comes under helpful rules of industry such as Health Insurance, hours of labour, etc. But the wife in the home has no legal status as a worker or as a person whose work has economic value. Two years ago groups of women at a Women's Conference were indignant that any suggestion should be made that women should be legally entitled to a certain proportion of the income of their husbands. In the 1941 session of the same Conference a Resolution to this same effect was passed unanimously in the open session. Quick march, reforms!

*A straw shows how the wind blows*

In the sphere of religious thought and action it is noteworthy that at Belur, outside Calcutta,

the Headquarters of the Ramkrishna Mission, where some years ago pictures of Sri Paramahansa Ramakrishna were published and widely sold seated alone, to-day the most popular picture there is that showing the saint on one side and his saintly wife, reverenced by him and his followers as "The Mother," on the other side. Similarly there is a growing appreciation of "The Mother" (Madame Richard) in the Ashrama of Sri Aurobindu Ghose in Pondicherry. In Chidambaran, Rukmini Devi performed Bharata Natya dances within the famous temple, close to a shrine of Nataraja, the Divine Dancer. In December 1940 she also performed the dedication ceremony of a new Hindu Temple in Benares erected by the Bharat Samaj. It is called Jyoti Temple (Temple of Light). She performed its first Puja of which the climax-words were "On behalf of you all, and on my own behalf, I dedicate and consecrate this Jyoti Temple for the benefit of our Motherland and for the helping of the world."

## CHAPTER X

### INDIAN WOMEN AND INTER-NATIONALISM

All through the ages, as far as there is any historic record of them in India, there have been contacts between the women of India and women of other countries of Asia. It was a Princess of China who carried the silk cocoon in her elaborate coiffure into India and thus introduced sericulture into Aryavarta. The group of families who travelled into Korea and Japan as an artist colony had pioneer Indian women with them. The Princess Sangamitra and her maids travelled from the Court of Asoka to Lanka. The women of Sindh accompanied their merchant husbands of old just as one found them before the war in Honolulu, Hawaii, and as one found a Muhammadan colony with most cultured women in Kobe, Japan. And what travels to and fro to Western Asia there were of North Indian women in the Mughal times from the day when Baber brought into India his Turkish wife !

Later centuries saw the descent on India of wives of merchants, militarists and missionaries of European and North American stock. They came—and they went. Very exceptionally few took root in India, unlike the rather similar cross-weaving in other respects that took place about the same time in Java and Bali. Indian women who migrated to those islands so deeply impressed their religious culture there that the stories of the *Ramayana* became the chief cultural expression of Java in the world famous dances (Wayang) performed by Muhammadan men.

Hinduism had made “crossing the black water” a cause of pollution, of possible ex-communication from the caste. This turned middle and south India introvert until within the last hundred years, and more especially the last fifty years, when the exigencies of qualifying for posts in the British Government regime in India necessitated passing examinations in Great Britain, and the offer of educational scholarships from America to many Indian Christian girls made foreign travel fashionable and attractive to those who could afford it.

Across the warp of the stay-at-homes goes

the shuttle of interchange of women nationals in these days creating a new design, or presenting old loved designs to them. Sarojini Naidu when in her teens electrified the dons of Cambridge with the beauty of poetry just as thirty years later she took the United States by storm through the magic of her oratory. Mrs. Graham up near Darjeeling collected and commercialised the lovely designs and crafts of the peoples of the Himalayas and sent them to Liberty's art-department in London where they are still eagerly bought. Each successive wife of successive Viceroys gives her influence, her stamp, her name and her forces of useful organisation to an altruistic and necessary scheme of public welfare; the Lady Dufferin Nurses Training Scheme, The Lady Reading Health School, the Lady Willingdon Educational Institutions and Recreation Clubs, the Lady Hardinge Women's Medical College and Hospital, the Lady Irwin Home Science College, the Lady Linlithgow Tuberculosis Campaign. Criss-cross over the world went the Russian, Madame Blavatsky, scattering oriental occult lore, and presenting to the West the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism. Her dis-

ciple Dr. Annie Besant did the same for Hinduism; while the Scudder family stand pre-eminent in their missionary zeal for Christianity in India.

It fell to my lot to be the organiser in 1907 of the meeting at which the first Indian woman gave an exposition of the vedantic philosophy in Dublin, Ireland—Mrs. Gangabai Khedkar, wife of the then Durbar Surgeon of Kolhapur State—and right capably did she present her subject.

A noteworthy strand of the texture of Internationalism was the service rendered by the United States women to Indian women through the donation sent for five successive years by Mrs. Chapman Catt's organisation of women suffragists to the Women's Indian Association to finance the latter's campaign for Indian Woman Suffrage. In the account books of destiny it will balance the disservice done by the exaggerations of Miss Katherine Mayo's book, "Mother India." I had the privilege myself of speaking in thirty-four large American cities in 1929 refuting from my own intimate knowledge of Indian life and conditions the untrue generalisations she made against the Indian people which sensation-mongers lapped up as gospel

truth, when instead it was insidious poison.

It was partly my contacts with women of many countries during my tour round the world in that year (1928-9) that gave us a panel of internationally-minded women to whom the All-India Women's Conference sent an invitation to attend a First All-Asian Women's Conference which it undertook to organise immediately after its own All-India Annual Conference in Lahore in 1930.

It was an ambitious and difficult adventure to undertake such a Conference, but the earth was then still free of world war, and waterways and means of travel were convenient. So often in India's past history had the city of Lahore acted as the gateway into India for nations from other parts of Asia that it seemed the inevitably right place in which to hold that All-Asian Conference, and events proved the rightness of the decision. The Women's Indian Association and the All-India Women's Conference helped in the organisation of this unique Conference, while an Invitation Committee of fourteen of India's most prominent women leaders of all communities sent out the invitation to leading

women of the 33 Asian countries. Women delegates attended from Burma, Ceylon, Persia, Japan, Afghanistan, Java; Non-Asian visitors came specially for the Conference from England, America, Ireland and New Zealand, also a Chinese ex-General and Poet, Lien Yen Hon, whose lifework is "A Feminist Democracy for China." Letters of sympathy and co-operation came from women in Syria, Palestine, Siam and from women of the Asian Soviet countries. The aims of the Conference were:

1. To promote consciousness of unity amongst the women of Asia as members of a common Oriental culture.
2. To take stock of the qualities of Oriental civilisation so as to preserve them for national and world service (simplicity, philosophy, art, the cult of the family, veneration for motherhood, spiritual consciousness).
3. To review and seek remedies for the defects at present apparent in Oriental civilisation (ill-health, illiteracy, poverty, underpayment of labour, infantile mortality, marriage customs).
4. To sift what is appropriate for Asia from Occidental influences (education, dress,

freedom of movement, cinemas, machinery).

5. To strengthen one another by the exchange of data and experiences concerning women's conditions in the respective countries of Asia. (economic, moral, political and spiritual status).

6. To promote world peace.

Undoubtedly the Conference made an impact on the public imagination at the time, and was a historic and successful occasion, but no invitation has been forthcoming since from any other Asian country to hold a further session of the work so enthusiastically, successfully and hopefully initiated in Lahore, India on January 17th, 1931.

Notable points about this Conference were that the Delegates on arriving in Lahore unanimously voted that Mrs. Sarojini Naidu should be President of the Conference though she was then serving a sentence of imprisonment in Poona in the Civil Disobedience Movement for the freedom of India. And the problem of her absence was solved when it was noted that each session should be presided over by a delegate of a different Asian country. The plan worked admirably.

In a time of such disturbed political atmosphere and action it was also remarkable that the Government of India allowed such a significant Conference to take place in India without interference. Two special services of an all-world international kind were immediately performed by the Conference. It helped to stop the ratification of a League of Nations Convention on Nationality drafted in terms which discriminated detrimentally against women in Nationality Laws. It sent the following cable to the Persian and Japanese Members of the Council of the League of Nations then sitting in Geneva:

“All Asian Women’s Conference requests you to support that the League of Nations Council should form a Women’s International Committee on Nationality of Women to act as a League Commission to study Women’s Nationality Question.”

This brought satisfactory support, and the All-Asian Women’s Conference became as a result one of the Women’s Associations which with seven others formed the Women’s Consultative Committee to the League of Nations, and its representative took part in the sittings of that

Committee for the next eight years. The All-Asian Conference itself voted in favour of equal rights of nationality for married women.

In later years Mrs. Kiron Bose and Mrs. Subbaroyan have been representatives of the Government of India in the League of Nations Commissions; Begum Hamid Ali interviewed the President of the League Assembly on the status of women; Mrs. S. C. Mukerjee was Government of India delegate and Vice-President of the Far Eastern Conference on Traffic in Women and Children, under the League of Nations, held in Batavia, Java. I had the privilege of bringing the greetings of the women of India to the women of Palestine, Syria and Iraq. It was especially thrilling to me to be the first woman to urge in a public meeting in Baghdad the right of Iraqi women to have the parliamentary vote and thus to become co-citizens with their men in their country which only the previous day had celebrated the release of Iraq from being a mandatory territory of Great Britain.

It has now become quite the expected thing that Indian women shall take world tours and act as unofficial ambassadors between countries

in the capacity of liaison officers of women's organisations. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu was the first of India's orators to visit almost every country of Europe, later to accomplish a famous lecture tour of the United States, and to visit South Africa at a time of crisis for Indians there. The Indian National Congress chose Mrs. Rukmini Lakshmi pathi to visit Japan as one of their representatives on a visit initiated by the Japanese Government. Mrs. Renuka Ray and Mrs. Dina Asana have toured the Far East and acted as bridge-builders between women of different Asian nationalities. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi was a welcome guest delegate to the Conference on the Cause and Cure of War in Washington in 1934, and Mrs. Ammu Swaminadhan and Mrs. Kamaladevi spoke at the similar Conference in 1940. The latter also made valuable contacts with the women of Egypt and Turkey, and in her visit to America made a point of getting into touch with colonies of people from India who settled early in the States, such as some hundreds of Indians who are employed in the Motor works in Detroit, especially in Ford's Factories.

The Women's Indian organisations have all

along been affiliated with the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, the International Women's League for Peace and Freedom, the International Women's Council, and in friendly co-operation with the World Young Women's Christian Association. The amount of ignorance that still exists in Europe and America about the conditions of Indian women's lives is appalling, and all to the bad.

"Comparisons are odious" I know, yet I must put on record that out of my experience of women the world round I found none with more beautiful, unselfish, kindly characters than the women of India. Those Indian women who are in public life to-day are distinguished by simplicity, and sincerity, and by an absence of the personal ambition, careerism, over-emphasis on "personality" and over-trained formalism that is frequently found in certain Western women. They are strong in intelligence and intuition; and in the long millennia of their national continuity there is a tradition of a wealth of experience of spiritual and social living and eternal values which will give points to the present-day so-called civilisation of materialistic nations.

Thus Indian womanhood has proved itself uniquely fitted to demonstrate the only alternative to a world mentality of war based on the victory of force. That alternative is the technique of non-violent non-co-operation, the way of satyagraha, or soul-force, where the individuals protesting against injustice and wrong-doing accept without bitterness the course of the law taken against them, and by their self-sacrifice release forces of spiritual influence which act on the higher natures of the opponents and break down the strength of evil. This is the campaign of the acknowledged Holy Man of India, Mahatma Gandhi, and it is an international movement of which the international headquarters may become in future, as it now is, India, and the women of India become the world leaders of this spiritual New Order which will place love of one's kind higher than love of self, or blood relationship, or nationality. The All-India Women's Conference in its full sessions has given its support to this ideal of non-violence, and in altruistic and intellectual unity with the women members of the Indian National Congress they will influence new world thought and action.

## CHAPTER XI

### VIGNETTES OF INDIA'S WOMEN LEADERS

#### I. THE OLD GUARD

##### *Srimati Kasturba Gandhi*

For over fifty years this wiry, tiny, unlettered daughter of the Bania people of Gujerat was a match for Mahatma Gandhi. She managed to live contentedly and successfully with a Saint. She preserved her own strong, shrewd, sensible mind. She was no mere "follower" wife. When I toured the country and spoke at countless meetings during Gandhiji's previous imprisonment I realised, while accompanying her for some time, that she was lion-hearted, fearless, eloquent, impersonal, wise, and as much consecrated to serving Congress, Country, and Humanity, as is Mahatmaji.

##### *Miss Cornelia Sorabji*

Always picturesque and striking in appear-

ance, the legal champion during the past forty years of the purdah-enwrapped aristocratic women, Miss Cornelia Sorabji has been a notable figure as the first Indian woman Barrister, the historic Indian Portia, one of a number of notable sisters who all dedicated themselves to serve their day and generation. Yet she has been before her time. Her father was a Parsi, her mother a Hindu; they fused through conversion to Christianity. Miss Cornelia was the product of the Protestant sect of English Christianity, and has seen her own country and presented it to the non-Indian world through those lenses in the individualist career she has carved out for herself and in which she has brilliantly shown the pioneer woman moulded by Western institutions.

*H. H. The Maharani Chimnabai Gaekwad of Baroda*

One born to rule. As much at home in the Courts and Capitals of Europe as in India. When she was sixty, after lunching me off gold plate, and showing me the artistic Parisian setting of her pearls, she briefed me as to how I might put the case before the late

Gaekwar for reformed inheritance rights for women, and for the initiation of such laws in Baroda. And then she brought me to her tennis court and played three spanking sets of tennis with tip-top men players. She has led Indian womanhood with spirit and vision since she published her book in 1911. But now she deplores the way modern women are interesting themselves in politics. Though she has retired from public life she is still "la grande Dame" and retains the old fire and the grand manner.

*Lady Jagadish Chandra Bose*

Doyen of the Brahmo Samaj community in Calcutta, a free woman full of motherliness and common-sense, for long years the enthusiastic and hard-working Secretary of the Brahmo Girls' School, and a number of schools of the Nari Siksha Samiti, organiser of a Training Home and Hostel for Widows and Indigent Women, all in Calcutta, Lady Bose is best known as the inseparable companion and life-long helper of the great internationally acclaimed scientist, Sir J. C. Bose. Devoted primarily to travelling with

him and presiding over their home and the interests of the students in the Research Institute, she proved that the Indian wife of to-day can combine most able service to the education of her sex with private home cares, and that the internationalism of science can be interlinked with the promotion of national well-being.

*Mrs. Rustomji Faridoonji*

'One of the most impressive personalities amongst the leaders of Indian womanhood. Tall, handsome, dignified, graceful, decorative, blessed with a beautiful, strong contralto voice, Mrs. Faridoonji has been a well-known Parsi figure in Society, and in later years has been the dynamic Secretary of the All-India Women's Education Fund Association and chief worker for the establishment of the first Home Science College in India, the Lady Irwin College in New Delhi. Her artistic nature and spiritual vision impress themselves on her many schemes for helping women and girls.

*Srimati Sarojini Naidu*

The brightest star amongst the galaxy of Indian women publicists. A born 'genius,

passing her Matriculation at 12 years old, she has excelled in whatever she turned her attention to. Dogged by ill-health she has performed miracles of physical endurance. With all the refined sensitiveness of a supreme singer of lyrical verse she endures years of ear-splitting committee meetings, and bone-shaking travel on Indian railways. One of the most brilliant conversationalists of to-day, it is perhaps only when she is on tour in foreign lands that this gift of hers finds full expression. Though an internationalist, a world citizen, the needs of India focalise her activities. Supremely magnetic, with a beautiful voice, this artist-soul has made the supreme renunciation of her gift of poetry to gain the freedom of soul and land for Mother India. She is "The Voice of India". I would not dare to put such a super-woman amongst categories of time but that she has called herself "a back number."

## II. THE TO-DAYS

### *Begum Hamid Ali*

I never think of the Begum without seeing beside her, her equally distinctive husband, and

remembering the devoted comradeship between those two. They looked as if they had walked right out of an old Moghul picture. Her eyes are always bright, set so steadily in her vivid small face. Her English is perfect. She is widely read and widely travelled, and is as broad-minded as her Muslim skirts. She has been like a cement between the women of the two major communities for many years. She is an incarnation of balance and steadiness. She made a popular unofficial Ambassador of India in her tour through Egypt, Turkey, the Central European countries, and England. She would be an ideal representative of India for Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Persia.

“We have suffered from many Hitlers in the home in every generation” is one of her “mots”.

*Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddi*

One of the women pioneers in her profession in South India. She also married a doctor. Years later a visit to England graduated her in self-conscious Indian patriotism and she became a consecrated worker for the cause of the country.

She sacrificed a lucrative practice to act as the first woman member of a Provincial Council and Deputy-Speaker of the Madras Parliament. She was meticulous in studying up the subjects on which she secured reform legislation. It annoys her that women in public life do not read newspapers sufficiently to be up-to-date on topical subjects. She rarely goes to cinemas or entertainments. She got a great reception in America, and after travelling all over India with the Hartog Commission on Education she could have been an all-India leader, but she limited herself to building up a very fine charitable institution in Madras, the Avvai Home for Orphans and Destitute Women. In politics she is a born Independent. Her patron saint is Ram Mohan Roy. Her husband said he had taken a new degree since he retired from the Medical College, he is now P.A., Personal Assistant to Muthulakshmiammal! A noble pair devoted to the poor. She continues the tradition of their partnership since his death.

*Mrs. Radhabai Subbaroyan, M. L. A. (Central)*

A typical representative woman of India to-day, poised, ambitious to serve great causes,

charming in manner and appearance, a good speaker, courageous, brainy, a favourite of the Central Government which chose her as one of their two women nominees to the Round Table Conference. She always means well, but she often means something different from what the majority of her organised sisters want. Despite bad health she bravely stood ready to be sponsored for a Bye-election that offered itself for the Central Legislative Assembly. No woman had till then been nominated or elected to that august body. The Congress High Command accepted her readiness, made good their pledge to give equality of treatment to men and women, and she became unopposed the first woman member of the Central Assembly. It says very much for the depth of her sincere patriotism that she had the courage to lay her all as a sacrifice on the pyre of Indian Independence by court-ing imprisonment in protest against England's treatment of India since war broke out. Husband, wife, and one son out of their four children were in jail at the same time. Their life-story is part of the Epic of the Battle of India (non-violent).

*Begum Shah Nawaz*

The Begum may be summed up as the Muslim complement of Mrs. Subbaroyan, if the latter may represent the Hindu community though she technically belongs to the Brahmo Samaj. Neither of them is known to all localities in India as Sarojini Naidu is. Begum Shah Nawaz is best known in Lahore, as Mrs. Subbaroyan is in Madras. She has functioned as Parliamentary Secretary (Education and Public Health) of the Punjab Legislative Council, and has no Congress leanings. She gave up purdah when she was 24, and even before then had begun a life of public service in addition to home and family duties. Her brilliant daughter is expected to make history as she is an orator and an original thinker.

*Rani G. Lakshmibai Rajwade*

In Delhi on Dec. 28, 1938, Srimati Sarojini Naidu said, in welcoming Rani Rajwade to be President of the All-India Women's Conference that session: "And now Rani Rajwade has succeeded Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. I remember how 25 years ago she had conquered Bombay,

as Dr. Miss Tai Joshi. I remember going to her room then and seeing her standing proud and tall there. Immediately I christened her 'The Spirit of India'. Imagine my pleasure when I find how she has vindicated that prophetic name." Perhaps that is one of the reasons why the Rani is deeply interested in the Historical Records Society of India. Ever since, she has been wedded to service. She brings the diagnosis of intellect to every problem, but primarily to the problems of women. Perhaps that is why in appearance she is like a living reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa," "the supreme expression in art of the eternal enigma of womanhood." Rani Rajwade's latest honour and responsibility has been the Chairmanship of the Women's Sub-Committee of the National Planning Committee of The Indian National Congress.

### *Rajkumari Amrit Kaur*

While Rani Rajwade is a typical orthodox Brahmin of the modern type, Rajkumari, one of the best possible examples of the Indian Christian, is an out-and-out devotee of Mahatma Gandhi, and has modelled her present-day life on his lines

of utter simplicity and ahimsa and khadi mentality. She always dresses in pure khadi, eats the simplest vegetarian fare, loves flowers, and at her homes in Jullunder and Simla cultivates the loveliest blooms. Yet she could leave all and go on long, hard tours with Gandhiji, for spiritual nourishment and universal unity are her deepest concern. She reminds one of an old-time Spanish saint, the ones worn almost to a shadow, with her long narrow face and her large dark eyes full of feeling. She never spares herself in her work for others. She lives only to serve. Her fine brain and able presentation by pen and voice of her points of view have left her impression on the Reports of the All-India Women's Conference on her evidence before the Lothian Committee, likewise before the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Franchise, and later impressed the Government Central Advisory Committee on Education. Though included among the "To-days" she will certainly carry over her leadership into the "To-morrows."

Did space permit, others who are decidedly "To-day's" foremost women and who should be "vignetted" are Mrs. Hansa Mehta, M. L. C.,

Lady Maharaj Singh, Lady Nilkanth, Mrs. Sultan Singh, Lady Mirza, Lady Mitter, Mrs. Kiron Bose, Dr. Poonen Lukose, Chief Medical Officer of Travancore State, Mrs. S. C. Mukerji, Dr. Hilda Lazarus, Dr. Albuquerque, Lady Srivastava, Lady Abdul Qadir, Dr. B. Natarajan, Mrs. Talyarkhan, Mrs. Janaki Bhat, Lady Venkatasubbarao, Mrs. Doctor, Mrs. Clubwalla, Mrs. Ammu Swaminadhan, Miss Amy Rustomji, and numbers of the Women Legislators.

### III. THE TO-MORROWS

#### *H. H. Maharani Setu Parvati Bayi of Travancore*

Her Highness is so vital, so imbued with power and vision, with intellectual vivacity and scholarship, that she bids fair to impress her strong personality more and more on the future. Already she is immortalised in Hindu history by her strong support of her son, His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore, in the promulgation of the Proclamation which opened the temples of the State to the Harijans and gave them equality of religious rights with other Hindus. Her position as the foremost woman of the leading matriarchate in the world, her first-hand knowl-

edge of the advantages that the economic independence of that system of social living give to womanhood, and her own immense dynamic aspiration to serve her State, womanhood, and humanity, will surely place her in the front rank of India's leaders for many years to come. She is small in person, with tiny hands but every atom of hers is charged with high voltage. She is a fine player of the vina, and interested in the development of the arts and crafts of the State. She is Pro-Chancellor of the University of Travancore.

#### *Her Highness The Princess Durru Shehvar*

Beauty as much as goodness and service entitle a woman to be a leader. This Senior Princess of Hyderabad is extraordinarily beautiful. One looks at her almost in astonishment, she is so tall, so radiantly fair in complexion, her eyes (so high up above the general person talking to her) so blue and so round and so straight-looking. She holds herself royally. To use her own words in another connection, she has "that inner anchor of poise, stability and assurance that comes from the capacity of self-realisation." She has

been identifying herself with the women of India in all aspects of their life. She wants every woman to be economically independent. She is a most sincere and practical promoter of indigenous industries and a reviver of old arts and crafts. She and her cousin (equally beautiful in a different style), the Princess Niloufer, have given a tremendous lead to the movement for giving up the gosha system as they both move about entirely free of all purdah restrictions.

*The Honourable Srimati Vijayalakshmi Pandit*

It is a remarkable fate to be the first Woman Minister in Indian History, and that, too, Minister for Local Self-Government and Health (appointed July 28, 1937). "Dainty" and "deft" are two little words which suit Minister Mrs. Pandit. She is full of courage and capacity. She has peculiar "charm." She is a brilliant speaker, particularly popular as a Hindi orator. Though her hair is slightly greying she is quite young, and if she gain better physical health she will have sufficient originality, independence, influence, humour and sheer intellectual ability to consolidate the leadership she already possesses of both men

and women, and be a planner and constructor of a New Order in Free India. She is like a light when one thinks of her. From Ministry to Jail and then to America, on a lecture tour is a fine apprenticeship for to-morrow.

*Srimati Kamala Devi*

Kamala Devi was the supremely romantic figure of the Non-Co-operation Satyagraha movement of 1929-33. A Saraswath Brahmin born in Mangalore, with early education at the Convent there, she became a widow when she was twelve, and for some years knew the arrested development and limitations which child-widows endure. At first hand she has known the ups and downs of social, domestic, maternal, organisational, political, legal and international experiences as few women do in less than forty years, mainly perhaps because these are years of rapid transitions of thought and action in the world generally and she seems to have been a focal point for them all. Three years she gave to the organising of all-Indian womanhood, five years she gave to everything connected with Congress and the Civil Disobedience movement. Largely owing

to the hard study she made of political science, economics and history during her terms of imprisonment for Civil Disobedience she became a convinced Socialist and was the organiser-founder of the All-India Congress Socialist Party. Her clear, uncompromising brain has led her to solutions of problems which are ahead of the majority of politicians in India to-day. Her sympathies are with the masses, with the poverty-stricken in the villages. Her two years' visit to Europe and America brought her into touch with the leaders of Western civilization and the havoc of war. Later she visited China also. She is a more convinced satyagrahi than ever. The future of a woman Socialist is impossible to forecast despite gifts of the highest quality. Her sex weights the scales against her. It should not be so, but it is, and especially when the woman has taken advantage of modern laws to secure marital freedom. But she also will be a constructor of a New Order for New India.

*Srimati Rukmini Devi*

Here is a unique type—the patriot who gives the go-by to politics and dedicates her gifts

and powers to achieve liberation of the soul and life of India through beauty and culture. Rukmini Devi is world travelled, and was much loved and highly thought of by Mrs. Annie Besant whom she tended in the latter's failing years. She has chosen to be India's modern ideal and spiritual Temple Dancing-girl. Here is the spiritually audacious new note she sounds for womanhood :

"Though it is right that women should have equality and freedom, that they should express themselves, and have the power to express themselves, the women of India must also remember that we do not want equality with men. Why? With what do we want to be equal? Are men our ideals that we want equality? We want equality with super-human beings. "We do not want equality with ordinary human beings.....We want superiority, that is more important than equality, superiority in the expression of the true soul of India, superiority in the expression of the essence of Indian culture, superiority to express spiritual life in all the ordinary things of life.....To that end alone women

must have freedom."

She gives slogans for the day after to-morrow and many days after that, and through her own dancing and her fostering of all Art she inspires multitudes to self-culture. The Kalakshetra at Adyar which she created and directs promises to be an inclusive Art-centre of the highest quality.

*Lady Cowasji Jehangir*

Here is a Parsi leader of Bombay Society whose heart is in the movement to liberate womanhood from the fear of too frequent, overburdened, unwanted child-bearing. This handsome, well-dressed woman can be seen as a regular weekly visitor in a well-organised, medically-staffed Mother's Clinic for Birth Control in the mill quarters of Bombay giving her practical sympathy to her overwrought poor sisters by passing on to them knowledge of one of the most fundamental gifts of Science and Reason to normal humanity.

*Mrs. Brijlal Nebru*

Day in, day out, Shrimati Rajeswari, herself a Kashmiri Brahmin, has been spending her every

moment of these last fifteen years in working for the social, economic, and religious uplift of the outcastes. She has had the joy of seeing them welcomed into the temples in Travancore States, into Madura's immense and famous temple, into temples hitherto closed to them in many other parts of India. She will go on with her self-chosen aspect of constructive work for the freedom of India till all symbols of degradation of these 60 million of India's men and women are removed by law and by awakened good-will in the hearts of the men and women of the Hindu castes. She is Gandhiji's right-hand woman in the Harijan Seva Sangh. From an over-taxing week (1940) presiding at the All-India Women's Conference she went straight on to a week of visiting Harijan villages in Mysore State where temples are not yet opened. And so she goes and goes and goes and never thinks of her own comfort. Her only resting time has been in prison.

*Srimati Bharati Ranga*

In spite of very delicate health this daughter of rural Andhradesha is the champion of the

agricultural labourers, men and women. Her husband, Professor N. G. Ranga, is one of the leading organisers of the Kisan Movement, and she does her share in mothering students at the summer schools at their home in the country, and in carrying on his work in Madras Presidency when he is touring, or in "His Majesty's Rest House."

*Aruna Asaf Ali*

A pale-faced slip of a Bengali girl married to one of the most brilliant Muslim Members of the Central Legislative Assembly, Aruna has been keeper of the conscience of all Assembly Members on subjects connected with women. She was in charge of the Women's Legislative Committee of the All-India Women's Conference. Her capacity for work is in inverse ratio to her physique, as was proved by her brilliantly successful organisation of the Delhi Sessions of the Women's Conference in 1938. She is a fiery spirit, a telling speaker, a popular figure in Delhi life, and always dressed in tasteful khaddar.

There is an *embarras des richesses* amongst

the personalities who have the future in their hands. It is tempting to describe enthusiastic and impulsive Miss Godavari Gokhale who gate-crashed in and out of the fastnesses of that masculine monopoly, "The Servants of India Society," in her devotion first to women and then to Labour. And soft-voiced Mrs. Jayashri Raiji who continuously tries to rouse all India to demand and to consume indigenous industries; Mrs. Kamalamma Dasappa of Mysore who annually organises, through a Committee of women only, a Swadeshi and Khadi Exhibition which is attended by over 20,000 people. Mrs. Hensman, M.L.C., is an untiring worker especially for the Y.W.C.A. programmes, a charming and persuasive speaker. Begum Sultan Mir Amiruddin, by invitation of the men Muslims of Trichinopoly, attended their mosque, and preached a sermon to them. She is a woman with brains equal to any two ordinary men together. Then there is that staunch follower of Premier C. Rajagopalachariar, Srimati Rukmini Lakshmipathi, a typical Congress Party-woman. What a contrast is the highly magnetic, individualist, Lady Rama Rao who will surely be a "To-morrow" now that

she has returned to live in India after her wealth of experience and popularity in Britain and Africa. Nor can one omit the gentle, sweet-faced Rani of Sangli; or the artistic and original musician Atiya Begum; or her very antithesis Miss Maniben Kara, jailed for being a leader of the Bombay Mill Strike; or Mrs. Iravati Karve, M.A., Ph.D., who as Registrar of the Indian Women's University, won its legal case for the retention of 21 lakhs of rupees after three years of litigation. Begum Aizaz Rasul, Vice-President of the Upper House of the Legislature of the United Provinces, while her husband was an ordinary Member of the Lower House, will surely lead someone somewhere in the future : while Mrs. Hannah Sen must here end what is really an interminable list, for she is quietly but very skilfully laying the foundation of a revolution in girl's education and in the future public attitude to home-making by the success she is achieving in her original creation of the curriculum of the Lady Irwin College, the first Home Science College in India, of which she has been the Directress since its foundation. Others of "The Young Party" are Miss Leilamani Naidu,

Mrs. Billimoria, Miss Gupta (Lahore), Miss Mridula Sarabhai, Miss Bharati Sarabhai, Mrs. Lakshmi Menon, Begum Mirza Ismail, Mrs. Currimbhoy. I have counted over fifty women of different parts of India who are outstanding extemporaneous speakers, and double as many who are fine organisers. They are all worthy of description, but only a "Woman's Who's Who" can accomplish the responsibility.

## CHAPTER XII

### FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

In seeking to follow up the trend of future developments of Indian womanhood I must keep strictly to outstanding characteristics of India and not let it get mixed up with the development of women of other countries whose climatical, historical, numerical, educational, religious and economical factors are different from those of India.

First and foremost the problem is one of immense numbers. The population of Britain only is equal to that of Madras Presidency. Even the population of the United States, or Russia, is equal to only half of that of India.

I am trying to peer forward into the likely development of the lives of 180,000,000 women and girls of the immediate and future India, computing the total population as at least 360 millions.

The most important facts to lay hold of about them are: 90% of them belong to the life

of agriculture; they live in a total of 700,000 villages, some large, mostly small, or in groups of houses hardly worthy to be called villages; they are unable to read or write; they are industrious, religious, unaggressive, gentle, kindly, unhealthy, with notable inherent culture through long tradition and freer and more prosperous times. To-day the agriculturists are unbelievably poor in money, but they have sources of real wealth in their power (i.e., village industries, if traded on a barter system), and this mass of agricultural women have real and acknowledged value,—economic value as necessary field-workers, spinners, estate-workers, etc.; and social value as mothers, for their production of children is the economic investment of parents for their material security in the future on earth, and in the case of the Hindus (three-quarters of the population) their investment through their male children of security also in the world to come through a system of spiritual entail unknown in Western civilisation, by means of which promotion and happiness in the after-death world is dependent on the unbroken annual performance of religious ceremonies for 70

years for the departed ancestors by the direct male descendants. This is akin to Christian Masses for the dead, but much more organised and binding, and more extensive through a compulsory period of years.

Motherhood essentially crowns and empowers this vast population of agricultural India. This agriculture is basic to India, as it is necessary to feed and to clothe India's teeming millions. India's tropical climate gives it the conditions to do so. The bulk of the food comes from the vegetable kingdom and should continue to do so,—rice, wheat, pulses, nut, fats, green and root vegetables. Similarly here are grown and produced silk, artificial silk, cotton, and wool, for self-clothing. The value of the women's work as spinners and weavers cannot be over-estimated. This is a climate, a type of land, and a type of people, who are not suited to industrialisation of either the Russian or the American pattern.

Therefore the fundamental development of India's womanhood must be examined and prophesied in terms of the agricultural masses of village women.

At this point I must state that all the progress related earlier in these pages refers only to the intelligentsia, and one must always remember that only 3% of India's women are literate, and those chiefly in towns. Even of the five million women who are voters probably about half are enfranchised through the "wifehood" (of a living voter) qualification and are also illiterate.

The future of these millions of women would have caused one to despair but for the marvellous awakening that the Indian National Congress has brought about through Mahatma Gandhi's leadership of the masses in the villages. In 1921 it made its first impact, chiefly then in towns, but since 1929 the propaganda in patriotism, in awareness of national subjection, in demand for national freedom, has spread like wild-fire.

Every village woman uses salt. Therefore when in 1928 the price of salt was raised against the opinion and the legislative representatives of the people, every woman knew about it; and when the Salt Satyagraha protest march was led by Gandhiji, and protest later spread through the land, even the most illiterate women were

interested. When a call for volunteers for Satyagraha action came, and men from the villages responded, women who understood through their emotions, through their intuition, also responded, and nearly 5,000 of them suffered imprisonment, while hundreds of thousands were co-sufferers with the men in the repressions of 1929 to 1933. This shock into political self-consciousness was made more intellectual by the nation-wide propaganda of the following years through which the Congress was able to sweep the country and secure the return of its candidates in the General Election of 1936-7. A new life swept through the villages, and it vivified the women as much as the men. They helped; their help was recognised and valued. All these women felt a new sense of power. Naturally and without shrinking they helped to get up Congress meetings, they came (with their babies) to the meetings, they walked in processions. When the supply of chosen men Dictators of the local Congress Committee had one after the other gone to jail, a woman became the Dictator. The enthusiasm of the women was infectious. Then they saw and felt the

gratitude of the men to them for their understanding and help. A new comradeship between these men and women arose. The struggle for the freedom of the country widened the interests of the women, and showed the men their women in a new light. They merged into human colleagues instead of being shy of one another through sex consciousness. That was the first stage in the modern development of India's wide womanhood. I write of things, of revolutions in people, in customs, which I witnessed myself with my heart beating fast with the happiness of watching human liberation through its expansion into something greater than individuals. That experience still lives in the hearts of the masses, in their memory, in their desires to repeat it. Through it already groupings towards further and permanent development of the village unit—the wife-husband—have taken place, and will continue because the leaders on the intelligentsia level have realised that these are the people who most truly can be called The Nation, they are its root-stock.

It is only since then that a strenuous effort has been made to formulate a scheme of com-

pulsory primary education suited to the girls and boys of the villages. The Wardha Scheme of Basic Education enshrines a basic idea. Just now like a seed it has fallen into the ground and seemingly died, but the necessities of the human soul will demand its revival improved in details. Then the Committees redrafting the basic education scheme must have as many women on them as men. Women must be 50-50 in all Committees and organisations for planning any new future Order. Here is where the progress gained by the educated and official women must be used in the service of the women of the masses. They must help the country women to formulate, to express the needs of the mother-half of humanity. The Wardha scheme was unintentionally a scheme for the needs of the country seen through the eyes of men, not through the eyes of men and women equally for a race, a duty, and a future, in which the two sexes and all they comprise are recognised as equal and complementary. That was a step towards Development Two.

This brings us to one of the developments that are taking place, alas, too slowly for the urgency of the need for it, namely, a widespread

rise in the courage of Indian women of all communities to assert themselves, to drop timidity and self-depreciation, to take the power that will not be denied to them if they determine to grasp it and use it capably. This is Development Three.

Men are only human beings, and it is a quality of humans to hold on to as much power as each person can achieve, and to share it or renounce it only with the greatest difficulty. Indian men are still holding power in their own hands in Panchayat Boards, in District Boards, in every kind of public Committee and Council. They do not want their monopoly invaded by women. They think they have done wonderfully when they have admitted "the" woman member into one reserved seat. Such a woman needs to be an extraordinary woman to make a success of such a lonely, difficult position. That some women have managed to continue in such public positions as Presidents of District Boards, and Presidents of Benches of Honorary Magistrates, is one of the hopeful developments. The practice and experience women are gaining for themselves amongst themselves in the growing

number of Women's Conferences is also only their apprenticeship for working on terms of equality with men in all public bodies where men now function alone with one woman thrown in as an extra, a luxury, an eye-wash to the idea of democracy and the rights of women. The present world order intensely *needs* the services, the experience, the intuition, the creative and conserving qualities of women, even a preponderance of women, in public planning. Men have been too much outside their houses and families. Women of the so-called upper classes have been too much inside them. They must learn to meet and co-operate half way in the places which will be dedicated to the service of humanity by men and women together, and they must meet equally, as humans first, and sexes only second or third.

[The most difficult struggle in attaining this new technique will be that of woman against herself. She must conquer timidity, shyness, sensitiveness, shrinking from insult real or fancied. She must conquer self-depreciation, she must learn impersonality, she must study her subject, she must be utterly reliable in punctuality, in

regularity, in attendance, in carrying through whatever duty she undertakes. She must cultivate a sense of humour. She must be prepared for misunderstanding, misrepresentation, even jealousy, and she must not expect gratitude or thanks even if she wears herself out for good causes. We need a new Order of Women Servants of India, a new cadre of Women I. C. S. They must be ready for private martyrdom in order to build better conditons for children, for their fellow-men and women, for the race. Especially their services must be given in public departments of future Food, Education, Agriculture and Health Planning.

Village women must rise to insisting on their inclusion on local Panchayats. If men seek the advice of the women of the family about money matters in personal affairs, they must take it about the village affairs, and the public affairs which also affect women's interests. For the sale of any piece of family land it is the custom in country life to obtain the consent of the elder women of the family as well as of the men. These women are also concerned in questions of rent and taxes, of quotas, of hours of labour and rates

of wages, and some of them should be on every public Board and Committee, Union, Council which discusses these matters. The Indian Government has legalised a precedent by making the presence of one woman compulsory in its Local Government institutions. The National Congress at Karachi in 1931 declared its intention to give equality of opportunity to women in all spheres of public life. But we are seeing that both these good intentions fall short of true needs and well-visioned statesmanship in their application. To get the woman's point of view into public affairs to-day will need a majority of women in all these bodies now controlled by men. The day has gone by when it is good for man or woman to be alone. The Hartog Committee on Girls' Education was brave enough and wise enough to recommend that for the immediate future, priority should be given to advancing the education of Indian girls. That is in order to reduce the disparity by which now six times as many boys as girls receive education. The same wrong-headed old idea about the necessity of keeping women within four walls and unconnected with the problems and service of the public, and man-

ning these with all men, is still rampant, as was seen at the time of the General Election where, for instance, the largest number the Congress put forward in any Province was only a dozen women candidates for the United Provinces Assembly of over 250 members, the Province which has 13 women members between Council and Assembly, the largest number of women so functioning in any Indian Province, of whom also one is Vice-President of the Council and another a Minister of the Congress Government, Srimati Vijayalakshmi Pandit, the sister of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The new understanding of these things has been summarised thus by Mrs. Pearl Buck, wise and experienced authoress of "Good Earth":

"Without women in public affairs men have made a world in which science is over-developed in comparison to human relations, in which force is admired rather than wise and humane controls. That he has done as much as he can alone is evident in the constant repetition of the same sort of booms, depressions and wars. Obviously it is time for some new sort of influence to come in, the in-

fluence of women who ought to have been there all the time. Men and women, alike in so much, equal in ability, if not identical, are fundamentally different in their attitudes towards life. To woman life is an achievement in itself, an end to be conserved. She alone knows the cost of producing life and of conserving it with care. When it is destroyed through bad economic conditions or through wars, her work is destroyed, her biological being is negated. Her strongest instincts are toward the preservation of life and the bettering of its conditions.

I believe that the condition in which humanity finds itself to-day is due directly to *lack of balance* between the instincts of man and woman. Democracy has not been achieved because we have not recognised the necessity for that balance. [Democracy will actually be present in a nation only when men and women together carry on all the activities of its life, and the tradition of the separation of the sexes is completely done away with.]

When one gets "back to the land" in one's

investigations of *human living conditions* it is heartening to find that there is *more equality* between the sexes, more fundamental co-partnership than there is in the whole gamut of social living from there up to the highest ideals of religions. Extremes meet. (I am not referring to payment for work in this statement.)

The All-India Kisan Movement and the All-India Ryots' Association, while good in their aims, are developing too much along masculine lines. They are meant to improve human conditions, and women are as human as men and need to give their support and membership and leadership to these movements just as much as the agricultural men. It is a weakness of these movements that so few women are joining them. All the more honour to the few women who are connected with them. They are showing a line of development which beckons to women for help. The All-India Spinners' Association gave most thought and most expansion to these women of the masses in the countryside. Its thorough organisation of spinning as a cottage industry gave a new life to millions of women workers, who in the off months of seasonal

work, or to older or younger women who remain in the home, added to the family income by the cloth they themselves made, by the money they thus saved, and by extra money they earned while not neglecting the duties of home and family care. This is Development Four. But here again as in the purely Land subject, the present capitalist system leaves the worker at a disadvantage. There is a crying need for the nationalisation or socialisation of the whole land system of India. Why will not our young men and women study the writings of Jai Prakash Narayan, or Dr. Bhagvan Das, or other experts on political economy, or Sir Vive-swara Iyer's "Planning for India," so that they may be equipped in thought for helping the masses to improve their wretchedly exploited poor condition?

The movement for rural reconstruction and rural uplift must attract more women in all its schemes. Women must be helped in these home industries by having the power of electricity installed in every cottage and hut as it is in Japan. Then many things which now take time and trouble, like pulling up water with a rope

from a deep well, like all the worries of lamps and fires, will be minimised, and cottage industries themselves will be more easily productive for self-sufficiency. One sees the signs that these things are coming.

Women are the hardest workers in the world. In the middle classes the woman who works within the home works harder than her sister who goes into what is technically called "industry" as a teacher, shop assistant, typist, nurse. In the really poorer classes, the woman who has to work the specified hours of the factory, of road-making, scavenging, has in addition to do the cooking, washing, cleaning-up, child-care of the home.

Some big changes are due in the status of the wife of the future. How will marriage develop in India? There are more men than women in India. So far marriage has been a market where parents sold their daughters to ensure their future economic security. The man got the pay for doing his job. That he was the wage-earner was the idea that was taken for granted, and it suited man to uphold this half-truth. Now the other half of this truth is

in the air. Home-keeping women are waking up to the fact that *their* hard work is at least half the labour for which their man is being handed certain money which he incorrectly calls "his" pay. It is in reality "their" pay to be used mutually in trust for their children as well as for the equal needs of each of these co-workers and co-partners in social and emotional living. There are many signs pointing to a new recognition by law that the wife is entitled to the honourable status of the technical term "worker", and as such also entitled to a proportion of the "pay" of which the present economic system gives full control to the man. [Women who have earned money before their marriage (and they are increasing in every country) are not going to put themselves into the condition of parasites dependent on the sentiment of husbands.] They will insist on the economic value of their work as mothers and workers for the man and the home being legally recognised, so that they retain the self-respect as workers which they enjoyed before marriage, so that they count as of equal value with women who work outside their homes, so that the whole institution of marriage may be raised to a greater

dignity for both husband and wife, and keep pace with modern conditions. This is Development Five.

It is like a growing pain in the institution of marriage. It is a human need, both economic and psychological, and it is expressing itself in all countries. The tide of its thought and expression is flowing in as quietly and as strongly as that of the sea. It is part of the discussion that is silently being held within present-day humanity as to whether marriage as it was should be entirely smashed up, or if it can be reformed sufficiently to suit the awakened consciousness of to-day's womanhood. A new economic status of the wife is a basic factor in creating the economic inter-dependence of husband and wife and the economic independence of the wife whether she work only in the home or outside it.

This will be also the modern way of evaluating Motherhood in terms by which all necessary and dangerous service is to-day recognised. "Nowhere is the unique idea of the *Motherhood of God* so strongly expressed and recognised as in India," says Vivekananda, and he proceeds:

"The mother is so highly honoured in India

that the Hindus are not satisfied until they see divinity in the form of the earthly mother. They say that one mother is greater than a thousand fathers, therefore the Hindus prefer to call the Supreme Being the Mother of the Universe. According to the Hindu religion each woman, whether old or young, is the living representative of the Divine Mother on earth. There is no other country in the world where every living mother is venerated as an incarnation of the Divine Mother, where every village has a guarding mother, a Goddess, who protects all as her own children."

In such a spiritual conception of woman it seems almost like desecration to mention such mundane things as ill-health, ignorance of hygiene, over-production of babies, mortality of one and a half million such infants annually within their first year; yet these details all have to be reformed in India so that the instrument may be perfect wherein the Divine Mother may express herself. Another of the signs of woman's efforts for the readjustment of the position of woman in the marriage relationship is her determination

to [use the help of Science to give her control over her own body so that she shall control her creative powers] and use her reason and common sense in deciding how she will space out her children more in accordance with healthy motherhood and better likelihood of strong offspring than is the experience to-day. "No woman," writes Kamaladevi, "can call herself free who cannot own and control her body and who can be subdued and enslaved through that very quality of fertility which once raised her to the altar as a deity in the dawn of early civilisation."

There need not be the slightest fear that the women of India will selfishly shirk motherhood when they have better knowledge and power to control it. Fundamentally, India is a religious country. Deep down in every father's, every mother's heart is the longing to bring into the world a new little Krishna, Buddha, Rama, Muhammad, Christ, Saint, Guru, a holy Being to bless the family and humanity. In Hinduism there is the teaching that the first child must be the result of sacrifice for the continuance of the race. It is known as the Child of Dharma. The carnal desire, the per-

sonal pleasure, is not to be the magnet. This is indeed the sublimation of patriotic parentage, that phrase which has been so degraded by Nazism and Fascism. This is Development Six.

The legal position of Muslim women is much better than that of Hindu women. They have just rights of inheritance, marriage, divorce, and religious education. Their great need is fresh air and free movement. But when the purdah system has been made to disappear in the Muhammadan countries of Turkey and Persia one need not despair of its disappearance in India also. The Muslims of India are as religious as the Hindus. It is the most democratic of religions. The following quotation from the Koran will show how explicit is its teaching on the equality of man and woman in spiritual law;

“And whoever does good deeds, whether male or female, and he or she is a believer,—these shall enter the Garden, and they shall not be dealt with a jot unjustly.”

While in every aspect of living conditions in the women of the educated classes there is improvement, one cannot but be depressed at

the slowness with which education spreads in numbers, and the slowness with which laws of hygienic living are learnt and applied. The beauty and desirability of ahimsa (non-killing) and non-violence are more understood than the prevention of death by the segregation of people with contagious and infectious diseases. Truly India lives more in its mind than in its body, that mind which sees the One Life in all things and which in its ideal way shrinks from taking life.

It is in this sphere of idealism that India is most uniquely holding up a new technique as the only possible alternative to war, namely, Satyagraha, non-violent non-co-operation. It is essentially a technique suited to womanhood whose whole nature and function is to create and not to destroy life. No trend in the life of world womanhood is so sinister, so fraught with future evil results, as the twisting of womanhood from the "ministering angel thou" type sung by poets of the past, into the maker of death-dealing armaments. It is, therefore, significant that organised womanhood in India has so boldly and openly ranged itself under the banner of Non-

violence, and that the Congress women, the women of the villages, are in this time of world war showing themselves able to sacrifice all they hold dear to proclaim their faith in non-violence which is the ideal of all the Saviours of the world, an ideal found in all sacred teachings. It is Development Number Seven. It is the Way of Power for the Womanhood of the Future.

New names have to be used in future to express units of power: "candle" power as the unit for high voltages of electricity in light is an inadequate term: "horse" power is an absurd word for the motor power of machines that control aerial bombers: "man" power is out-of-date for factories and farms now filled with women; "woman" power is a term arriving as a new necessity! But India with its God and Goddess sense, the seventh sense, already knew it and used it as "Shakti."

## ADDENDUM

*By Dr. J. H. Cousins*

The request for a second and up-to-date edition of "Indian Womanhood Today" comes at a time when its authoress is not yet sufficiently recovered from the paralysis that overtook her in August 1943 to be able to undertake the work that such a revision requires. But as it is the wish of the enterprising publishers that so historically useful and intimate an account of a great era in the history of India and in the world-movement for the betterment of womanhood should include some account of cognate happenings between its first edition in 1940 and its second in 1946, I have undertaken the compilation of this short addendum, under the supervision of Mrs. Cousins, from materials supplied by her friend and distinguished collaborator in activities for the service of Indian women and children, Dr. (Mrs.) S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, pioneer of womanhood in the Indian Legislatures.

At the fifteenth annual session of the All-India Women's Conference at Bangalore in December 1940, at which Mrs. Cousins was greeted as "the Mother of the Conference," an emphatic protest was raised against the limitations imposed by the terms of reference of a Committee appointed by the Government of India to examine the injustice done to women under the Hindu Law. A much more comprehensive and drastic examination, in order to adapt the Law to meet modern conditions was demanded. Such extension was later secured. Some notable figures among the leaders of the Conference were absent owing to the stiffening of the Government's attitude towards agitation for national freedom.

The sixteenth All-India Women's Conference at Cocanada in December 1941 was distinguished by the Presidentship of Sri-mati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, the first Indian Woman Minister of State, sister of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and like him an enthusiast for freedom, and therefore, in the antipathetic relationships between Britain and India at the time, on the shuttle to and from jail. Despite the deterioration of the political situation

in India, the Branches of the Conference carried on nation-wide work for the spread of literacy and for the collecting of opinion to be presented to the Government Committee on Hindu Law as it affected women.

Three dark years were to pass before another session of the Conference could be held. The August 1942 Resolution of the Indian National Congress was so uncompromising in its determination to win freedom for India that it was met by nation-wide action by the Government of India. Thousands of the most intelligent and wide-aware citizens were arrested and imprisoned on suspicion of sympathy with the nationalist ideal. Among these victims of official panic were some of the finest women of India, indeed of the world —Srimati Sarojini Naidu, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Rameshwari Nehru, Kamaladevi, Ammu Swaminathan, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. Girl students of suspected nationalist leanings were arrested and imprisoned. Three daughters of one of the chief mill-owners of Gujarat were jailed for daring to exert the democratic right of freedom of expression, young

women of outstanding personal charm and intellectual distinction. With the President and President-elect of the All-India Women's Conference (Srimati's Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Kamaladevi) in jail, as well as other women leaders, the holding of a seventeenth session was postponed pending a hoped-for passing of the crisis.

Meanwhile events concerning the womanhood of India, which is the theme of this book, indicated no slackening of enthusiasm or effort. Membership of women's organisations increased. Work went into the raising of funds and the rendering of direct help in areas ravaged by natural calamities, by cyclone, flood and famine. The work of Sevasadans, Orphanages such as the Avvai Home at Adyar, Madras, created and directed by Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, and Homes of Service expanded. Less spectacular activities also proceeded. The agitation of the All-India Women's Conference resulted in the appointment in 1943 of Srimati Renuka Ray, M.L.A., to the Central Legislative Assembly to represent women in connection with proposed legislation on Hindu Intestate Succession and Marriage.

Her work in this cause won admiration from all sides. On other matters, such as the Delhi University Bill, and debates on Food and Women in Mines, Mrs. Ray brought women's influence and ideals to bear with telling effect. In this she had the backing not only of the All-India Women's Conference but of other organisations such as the National Women's Council and the Women's Indian Association.

The death in prison of Mahatma Gandhi's aged wife, the venerated Srimati Kasturba, in the beginning of 1944, sent a wave of unifying emotion through the women of the country, to whom she stood as the ideal Indian wife. A fund was raised to perpetuate her memory in works for the good of the people in which she was specially interested. The vast sum of four crores of rupees (roughly two million pounds) was collected. The proceeds of this will be disbursed by a Committee, of which Mahatma Gandhi is President, for the advancement of women's education, particularly in villages, and to bring help to them in illness through the training of women nurses.

A visit by Madame Chiang Kai Shek with

her husband to India brought her into intimate touch with the women's movement, particularly with its educational side through a visit to the Lady Irwin College of Home Science which had been founded by the All-India Women's Conference and much helped by the veteran feminist, Mrs. Hilla Rustomji Faridoonji. In this connection it is worthy of note that when Srimati Kamaladevi was visiting China, Madame Chiang Kai Shek had presented through her to the women of India a silken scroll appropriately depicting an eagle perched on a pine-tree at sunrise. This beautiful gesture between the great nations of China and India is treasured at the Headquarters of the Conference in Bombay.

Tours in America and China by Srimati Kamaladevi and in America by Srimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, gave the women's cause in India a remarkable range of publicity. Mrs. Pandit's speeches during the San Francisco Conference on world-security were received with great admiration. From internment on suspicion Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was shifted to being a delegate from India to the International Educational Conference in London, in which

her speeches made a strong impression. After undergoing imprisonment on the flimsiest pretext, Srimati Ammu Swaminadhan was elected from a Madras Constituency to the Central Legislative Assembly in the General Election of November 1945 with a majority of 10,870 votes over her anti-Congress opponent.

A notable feature of work for women in India, prior to August 1942, was the organisation and conducting from March to June of that year of a Camp for training women for social service. The Camp, at Abrama in Gujerat, was planned and constructed by Srimati Miraben assisted by Srimati Mridula Sarabhai. The work of the Camp was arranged and run by Srimati Kamaladevi. Of the 49 women trainees from various parts of India, 11 were Mohammedans, which indicated the spirit of unity that prevailed among awakened Indian women. The subjects dealt with included home industries, co-operation, health, education, civics, scouting, folk dancing and community singing.

These and other subjects were reported to the seventeenth session of the All-India Women's Conference at Bombay in April 1944. While

this summary is being compiled, the eighteenth session is announced for December 1945 in Hyderabad (Sind).

There are numerous women's activities all over India in addition to the Branches of the All-India Women's Conference. An account of their activities would overweight this end chapter, which perforce can only indicate main lines of service. The development in the consciousness and work of women of all grades and groups within the last thirty years has been remarkable and beyond anticipation in the eras prior to the modern movement for their liberation and well-being. Their contribution to the life of the country has been enormously rich and purifying, and is certain to exert an ever-growing influence for good in the agitated years that are likely to supervene between the present antagonistic political demands and the ultimate finding of ways and means whereby India may take her place among the foremost of the great nations of the world with her special endowment of idealism and her natural instinct for "the things that are more excellent."

The foregoing summary was written over a year ago. In the interval between then and publication, which was lengthened by post-war exigencies, the appointment of Mrs. V. L. Pandit to lead the Indian Delegation to the United Nations Organisation raised Indian womanhood to the pinnacle of world-renown through the intellectual grasp, and uncompromising idealism and crystal clarity with which she victoriously sponsored the cause of Indians in South Africa. This in itself is a cause for pride on the part of the women of India. That she broke down the case of the astute antagonist of Indian interests in South Africa, Field-marshal Smuts, gives an additional piquancy to her achievement, and sets her in the front rank of statesmanship.

It may be added that, among remedial measures in the life of Indian women, the work of Mrs. Kulsum Sayani for the increase of literacy in Bombay has been remarkably successful. A considerable amount of the limitation from the purdah system has been reduced since the book was written. A second session of the All-Asian Women's Conference on the lines of the first has not yet been found possible; but a

movement for such a Conference in the Middle East has been set on foot, and will receive the best help of Indian women.

And lastly, Mrs. Cousins asks me to express her deep and abiding love for her sisters of all creeds and classes in India, and the intense happiness she has recently had in being present at meetings of women in Madras.

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